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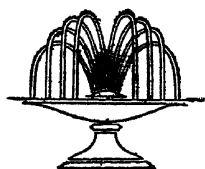
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A CASTLE IN CARINTHIA

A CASTLE IN CARINTHIA

Johan Fabricius



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CHAPTER ONE

COBWEBS AND DUST

DEATH came to Adalbert, Baron Weygand, during the night of November 12, 1889. It was in Carinthia, at "Maria-Licht," the Baron's castle and estate. During his lifetime he had been noted for his gentle disposition and for his resemblance to one of the aged Austrian archdukes whom he had endeavoured to copy even in his voice and bearing. Six months had gone by since Ottilie, his very forceful consort, had departed from this world after years spent in a bath-chair; he now had followed her in her death as he had always followed her, in all true faith and obedience.

The legal heir to the castle with its surrounding woods and fields was Adalbert's nephew, Georg von Weygand, a cavalry officer on the active list. Although in his forty-eighth year, his outspoken ways, which had become a legend in his regiment, and a stolid indifference to the charms of rapid promotion had precluded him from rising above the rank of Major. In fact his last promotion had only proved once more what he had always known: the service became progressively less attractive with every rise in status. It was now farewell to his daily rides with his men, to galloping and trotting in formation in the fresh morning air; instead, he was bound down to much office work for which he felt no vocation whatsoever. He whose soldier's heart had been surreptitiously gladdened so often by his men's broad jests in all the dialects of Austria had now to listen to ponderous café talk, much back-biting, and elegant cynicism which seemed to him unworthy of an officer and out of place. Consequently, when Uncle Adalbert died, he was not long in making up his mind to hang up his sword and become a landed nobleman and farmer in the autumn of his life.

As a matter of fact, the pastoral life had never ceased to exercise a secret fascination upon him. If he had been induced some five or six years ago to apply for a transfer to the Vienna garrison it was only to satisfy the heart's desire of his young wife. Without being a professional beauty, Elisabeth's charms had been sufficient to exact from the young world of fashionable Vienna that homage of which she had dreamed in the stillness of the provinces. Homage was all she had ever longed for. Apart from a fleeting kiss now and then in a ball-room—and the thought of it filled her with subsequent regret—she remained faithful to her ageing husband who watched over her as a solicitous father and continued to escort her everywhere, although these perpetual outings and amusements were to him an ever-recurring ordeal.

Three years went by and then his Elisabeth caught pleurisy in the cold of a Viennese night; on a never-to-be-forgotten January afternoon she died.

The regiment was relieved when Major von Weygand prematurely resigned his commission. The superior officers saw themselves delivered of a headstrong, cross-grained fellow who had proved adamant when it should have been a question of give and take, and whose secret purpose it seemed to be to provide them daily with a pattern of dutifulness, although he might have known that this had never been the road to popularity in the Imperial and Royal army. As for the younger officers, they were sorry no doubt to be losing an unfailing target for their fun and ridicule—when they were among themselves, of course! On the other hand, it was difficult not to welcome the departure of any superior officer: yet another rung on the ladder had been negotiated—thank the Lord for that.

A few who had worked in closer contact with him, for instance his adjutant in the office, declared outright that the regiment was losing its best and most reliable officer. And Karl, his batman, who every morning used to bring up his instructions at the same time as his gleamingly furbished riding boots—to say nothing of the many attentions with which he surrounded his master during manœuvres in Galicia—made no effort to restrain his tears when upon his departure the major shook him by the hand for the first time in his life, wishing him the best of luck and a happy future.

And so Georg von Weygand turned his back upon the great city. The last few days were spent in getting together some suitable clothes for a rural existence and a number of books which seemed to him essential for his future activities. On the eve of his departure, he paid a final visit to the Döblinger cemetery where his wife lay buried. At the gate he bought from a half-frozen flower seller a bunch of guelder roses, the only flowers obtainable at this time of the year. They looked paltry and insignificant against the black of the widower's glove; more paltry still as they lay on the snow-covered slab under which was resting all that in Vienna was left of his heart. As he was moving away, slowly, wearily, and with bowed head—for nobody was there to see him; the cemetery was quite deserted—he bethought himself that he might have brought her flowers more often when she was alive. Maybe he would have done it, too, if she had not received so many from others, sometimes even from people scarcely known to them. But now no more flowers were sent; so *his* turn had come. The thought filled him with grim satisfaction although it all seemed now to be of little use.

Next morning, while Vienna was still lying in the dank, grey fog that had settled overnight, he stepped into the cab which was to take him to the Western station. His servant Joseph, whom he had engaged

the week before, was to leave later in the day with the heavy luggage after having attended to the transport of the two saddle-horses. Old Wagner, the cab owner of the Lazarettgasse, who had wished to honour his departing client by attending to him personally upon this last occasion, scrambled down from the box, in ample cloak and woollen muffler, and, respectfully uncovering the grey curls of his coachman's pate, proceeded to open the coach-door for him.

In the Mariahilferstrasse carts loaded with meat and vegetables came rattling by like shadowy monsters on their way from the goods station to the Naschmarkt. A lamplighter was hurrying through the streets to extinguish the last lights; it seemed absurd to hasten so, for it was still dark. And dark it remained until the train, emerging from under the station roof heavy with soot and smoke into the open fields, went out to meet the break of day.

At the time of his uncle's burial Georg had gathered the impression that since Aunt Otilie's death, and probably ever since her stroke, things in the castle had been allowed to go to pieces. Apparently some of the less-used rooms had not been so much as aired for years. Through a broken pane the rain had got in, damaging the carpets and upholstery. Somewhere or other a valuable oak arm-chair was sagging on its three remaining legs against a table; and when the Major took out a book from the library he found mildew on the parchment binding. It was worst of all in the attic apartments. In one of the smaller room he found some piled-up empty trunks which twenty, thirty years ago had journeyed far to Europe's fashionable watering-places but were now only breeding-grounds for mushrooms.

Actually the whole castle stood in need of repair; the roof and the chimneys, the windows and doors, the stairs and the floors. Masons and plasterers would have their hands full for weeks if all the cracked and damp ceilings were to be plastered afresh and all the broken stonework in the walls replaced. But so long as his finances did not permit of a thorough restoration, the Major had to limit himself to a few essentials. There was for instance the stone gallery: looking down through its Romanesque archway, you saw in a picturesque frame the little courtyard below surrounded by the kitchens, the stable, and the coach-house. Some of the huge, heavy oak supports sounded hollow when he tapped them as he passed; in one of them the knob of his riding whip could be almost completely inserted.

Georg's first expedition was to the stables, where three coach-horses were accommodated—his own had not yet arrived from Vienna. The apertures for ventilation over the door seemed to be stopped up with birds' nests and the boarded floor had sagged. Krone, the coachman, who had been warned, came running up in some agitation. He was not used to stable inspection; when his previous master wanted to

examine the horses—and that had not been for ages—he had them brought outside. With an ominous countenance the Major pointed to what he had discovered. For the birds' nests Krone could think of no better excuse than that in his view enough fresh air got into the stable through the doors which had long ceased to close properly and were full of chinks. He was proceeding to show him these useful gaps, but the Major seemed prepared to take them for granted. In fact, he was paying less attention to them than to something in the coachman's flushed face which in his view betokened drink.

"And has it never occurred to you that the animals might break their legs on this rotten stable flooring?" he enquired.

Krone endeavoured to put a ring of conviction into his manly reply: "Herr Baron, they know the spot where they might sink through."

"In that case, they show themselves to have more sense than those in whose charge they are." Krone stood crestfallen and silent. As he waited the issue of the inspection which was now being pursued in the direction of the horses themselves, he repeatedly mopped the sweat from his brow. Two of the animals appeared to have been hurt by their harness. With shaking knees he promised to attend to the harness and to treat the slightly grazed portions of the hide with an ointment which he kept for the purpose. This assurance was not deemed worthy of the Major's notice and he left the stall in withering silence. Krone had a mind to run after him, but upon reaching the door thought better of it. Instinctively he turned and found his way to his wife instead.

A few minutes later Anna Krone, the cook, stood wringing her hands in front of her master, imploring him not to dismiss her husband who for so many years had been a dutiful and faithful servant on the estate. He had always taken such care of the horses. Just recently, perhaps, he had been a trifle less attentive. . . .

The Major fixed her with his straight, grey eyes; "You mean, since he took to drink?"

Speechless and open-mouthed she met his look. Then she burst into sobs. "You've hit it, Herr Baron; and if you now get rid of him, you will only make him worse! Once before he took to drink, but then my lady the Baroness and I together were able to cure him of it. All he needs is to be carefully watched. . . ."

"Who keeps the keys of the wine cellar?" he enquired. With a mute gesture she fumbled in her skirts and laid down the keys in front of him. "When my servant Joseph arrives, give them to him," he said, without so much as touching them. The woman nodded. She was hurt and tried not to let it appear. "I understand; you no longer wish to entrust them to me."

"I am only trying to make it easier for you," said Georg. She was

trying to see the point of this too. "Yes, Herr Baron, I see, if that's what you mean . . ."—then suddenly losing control once more—"But the keys have never got into Krone's hands; I swear it!"

"I am quite sure they haven't," said the Major, soothing her, "Just tell your husband to be at the stable to-morrow morning at eight; I shall then have a look round." Anna Krone wanted to thank him; she could not. Suddenly she hurried back to the kitchen, her apron pressed against her eyes. Lost in thought, Georg stood clicking his riding whip upon the table. Then, proceeding upon his round, he remembered that he had meant to ask her christian name.

The farm was the next matter requiring his attention. As he passed through the gateway it occurred to him that the small drawbridge—in the old days it must have served as a protection against malefactors roaming the woods—might well require some reinforcing. Failing this precaution, it was as likely as not that one fine day Aunt Ottilie's heavily creaking old coach would land among the bramble bushes with which the moat was overgrown. In the family circle a certain legendary renown had become attached to Aunt Ottilie's coach and Georg thought he might as well retain it for himself, although he was not likely to have much use for it.

Immediately behind the rather narrow castle grounds the considerably more extensive farm lands stretched out with their barns and sheds. With confident pride, farmer Eisengruber took him round to see the well-fed cattle. Here, fortunately, everything was meticulously cared for. The man took advantage of this first meeting with the squire to express a number of long-harboured wishes, particularly with regard to the equipment which in his view was completely out of date. The adjoining property which was fitted up with more modern appliances had a great deal less to pay out in wages. Again and again the question had been raised with the Baron now deceased but it had always been necessary for him to talk things over with the Baroness first, and, of course, nothing was ever done. It was different in the old days when the Baroness herself came to inspect the farm.

As a first step Georg promised soon to go and have a look round the neighbouring property; he would then see with his own eyes how matters stood. But there was something in the farmer's look and bearing that distracted him from the subject at issue. The question was out of his mouth before he knew it: "Haven't we met before, a long time ago?" "Now that you mention it yourself, we have sat together now and then in a hay-cart," was the reply.

Youthful memories rose up in Georg's mind. He was ten years old and a boy again, staying with Uncle Adalbert and Aunt Ottilie—Aunt Otti as he called her then. "But why don't you remind me at the same time of the wrestling bouts we used to have?" he enquired good-

humouredly. The unexpected ease with which he now remembered rather thrilled him.

"Because I have been afraid of you ever since," replied the farmer with a grin. Georg was lost in thought. He was conjuring up the boy—as he then was—who was now walking by his side, a man of fifty years. In the interval the inexplicable had happened: they were growing old and lonely . . .

"But I can't quite see it yet. Are you the son of the farmer who in those days ran the show?"

Eisengruber had no difficulty in following the trend of his thought. "My father," he said proudly, "was then a farm hand working here at the time. The farmer had four sons of his own; but the farm was not good enough for them! They set out for America to get rich quick. Whether one of the four ever did I cannot say. I only know that the youngest came home later on, a down-and-out—he now lends a hand on the farm. If my boy were ever to do anything like that. . . ."

"Is there only one?" enquired Georg.

The farmer slowly nodded. "I had another," he added gravely, "But he got run over . . . the cart was overloaded with beetroot. There are also two girls; one is fourteen, the other twelve. My boy Toni has just turned five. His brother Clemenz would be fourteen this coming Easter."

Unexpectedly he broke off; there was something he wanted to ask: could he have a stone floor in the sheds and a better drainage? The idea had come to him because the masons were busy in the castle in any case. Georg promised to get an estimate from the builder and the farmer's countenance lit up.

Near the horses they came upon a fair-haired little rascal, with bold dark eyes. The farmer seized him by the hair with fatherly tenderness and drew him to him. "Here we've got him . . . this is my youngster; he's waiting for me here to get his beating—I spend my time forbidding him to come near the horses. Out with you, you little scamp, clear out of here at once!" But the boy was already gone.

The farmer's wife, Magdalena Eisengruber, was waiting for them indoors with a glass of wine. She was still a young woman and given to laughter although the loss of her eldest son had unmistakably left its mark upon her face. Suddenly, in the middle of the conversation, she anxiously turned to her husband. Had he come across Toni by any chance?

"No doubt we shall see something of him by the time the food is on the table!" said the farmer breezily with a wink in the direction of the squire.

Outside the farm hands were already approaching for the midday meal. There was little to do upon the land so early in the year. For the time being the men were working in the wood. At the back of

the farm a primitive saw-mill had been installed. They had already observed who had come to visit Eisengruber. One of them seized the opportunity to show his hatchet to the farmer with a request to be allowed to buy another. Georg understood what was here silently expected of him. He enquired into the price of a new hatchet and gave the man the money for it. The small gift was felt by the farmer to be in the nature of a promise. The man rejoined his comrades, the hero of the day.

Georg wished to meet them all—what were their names? How long had they been working here? Most of them appeared to have been employed from father to son; their forebears, no doubt, had been serfs living in huts around the castle.

A patriarchal feeling such as he used to have for his men welled up in Georg; this, then, was the larger family for which he was responsible. As they were about to settle down hungrily to their meal, he left the farm-house feeling richer in spirit than before.

“He does not look as if he would stand any foolery,” said one of the maids. For reasons of prestige, the farmer was not in the habit of joining in the conversation at table. If he opened his mouth, it was to administer a reprimand or to utter a thanksgiving. On this occasion, however, he could not forbear to say: “I had a fight with him once when I was a lad—and I have good reason not to forget it!” This early thrashing was immediately felt by all of them to be a privilege, so great already was the authority of the new squire.

Kalmuk and Sultane had now arrived from Vienna and during the next few days Georg reconnoitred his entire domain on horseback. In mild winter weather, sheltered by the surrounding woods, he rode at foot pace through the fields in which the winter corn lay hidden. Together with Franzl, the sturdy young forester, he surveyed the growing timber on the estate and listened in silence while the situation was explained to him. But while timber prices were talked of, the Major could not prevent his eyes from wandering to where traces of game lay imprinted in the soft earth. It was not Franzl’s fault if his eye followed that of his master’s. Yes, there was much game, too much, in fact—the young trees were suffering from it. But then it was an age since the previous Herr Baron had hunted. There were many hares and partridges and the farmer was not best pleased about it. They fled from out of the neighbouring woods where there was too much shooting for their liking. There was bigger game too, but in the winter, Freiherr von Hagel, their neighbour, endeavoured to lure it back to his own domain. So long as snow lay on the ground, food was regularly left here for the beasts, but latterly the Herr Baron had no longer thought it necessary. What was Franzl to do? Leave things as they were or . . . ? Hopefully he looked up at the new squire who nodded assent. Better times were coming.

Ambling homewards from these tours of inspection, Georg felt satisfied. Thanks to Eisengruber and Franzl, whose hearts were in their work, all was well with the world outside. Meanwhile, intense activity prevailed in the castle itself where all the maids who could be spared on the farm were busy from morning till night. Fortunes were spent in bees-wax, soap, and metal polish; the nearest town had to be ransacked for the necessary pails, brooms, and scrubbing-brushes. Who knows but that the maids set about their work with more fuss than the situation warranted; they found it invigorating to their feminine souls and, besides, there was so much to inspect, so much to probe. Joseph, whose allotted task it was to keep a tight rein on them was finding life difficult. He was ignorant of their dialect and, to cap it all, he had been unable to conceal a sly liking, compounded of fatherly feeling and something else besides, for eighteen-year-old Trudi, the youngest of the batch. The others, alas, were not slow to discover his secret predilection, much to the detriment of discipline. In the end there was no holding them so long as the Major himself was out of the way: the stately rooms of the old castle resounded with their carefree sentimental songs.

For all Joseph's sombre prognostications, such quantities of bees-wax and copper polish were bound to tell in the end. There came a day when the Major was able to send the maids home. He retained only two of them after consulting with the farmer. As Joseph's advice had not been sought, it must have been due to a higher dispensation or to Trudi's active diplomacy that she was one of the two. Johanna or Hannerl, a buxom, blushing minx who pleased Georg at first sight was the other.

For several weeks Maria-Licht basked in its own festive youthful splendour. Flattered that they were the chosen among so many, Hannerl and Trudi bravely fought on against dust, moisture, and mould, but it proved to be an unequal struggle. Georg himself was now discovering that it was a labour of the Danaides to keep the place in proper trim, and that his ageing uncle had abandoned the attempt once Aunt Ottilie, as the high priestess of cleanliness and order, had ceased to be ubiquitous in her endeavours to keep the sacred fire alive among her vestal virgins.

In the unoccupied rooms of the upper story, time had resumed its rights: from out of hidden cracks and funkholes the spiders were cautiously peering out, preparing once again to spin their web over the mounting dust.

It was no good. Again and again, the maids, and more particularly Trudi, were irresistibly lured back into the kitchen as the odour of cooked food rose up from below and their thoughts turned to the comfort and warmth of the great charcoal kitchener. Usually Joseph was there. He was particularly adept at hearing when his master in

the library was ringing for him. He liked of an evening to tell them of his earlier posts; and as often as not it would be about a certain great lady whom he had served in more ways than one, until at last the husband got wind of it and Joseph had to pack up and go. Yes, it was a gay life in Vienna! There was no end to the amazing stories Joseph had to relate of the wonderful city and Trudi would heave a sigh at the end of such an evening, declaring that she too would like to have a peep at it all one day. But Joseph would have to take her round; alone she would be scared! Joseph promised he would, with something so eager and amorous in his eye that Hannerl could not forbear to give Frau Krone a nudge when he was not looking. But Frau Krone kept a straight face; she considered any frivolity here in the house as an offence against the Major. He would expect, she thought, a befitting tone of gravity to reign among his staff, even when he happened not to be present. Her husband had given up drinking entirely. By eight o'clock in the morning, when the Baron came to inspect, he had already got through his work in the stable and the two saddle-horses which had arrived from Vienna were to him as his own children . . . Yes, all this was making Anna Krone feel quietly happy, but all the same Hannerl could not expect her now to give way to carefree laughter as in the old days.

And now an utter stillness hung over the castle, in keeping with the austerity of the furniture and with the man who had come to live here. After his daily morning ride, the Major would sit in the library pertinaciously struggling through some manual on veterinary science, unless it were, by way of diversion, a pamphlet dealing with potato diseases. Now and then there was some correspondence to be done—the local authorities were worrying him with questions about his property, the size of which they appeared to resent. There was also a lawsuit pending about an insignificant strip of land. To this he abruptly put an end by coming to an agreement with the lawyers out of court. Above his writing desk—a somewhat rickety antique, all drawers and secret pigeon-holes, in which over-cautious Uncle Adalbert had sorted out and preserved everything under the sun including rusty, unusable nibs and unglued stamps—Georg had hung the sword of his cavalry days as a perpetual exhortation to resolute action. Just below, he himself appeared in a framed photograph, in uniform, surrounded by his men, a squadron on horseback. He was personally responsible for this mural decoration just as with his own hand he had hung up the painted portrait of his wife which adorned what was called euphemistically the music-room, where no musical instrument was to be seen.

At meal times Georg sat in lonely state at the long stained oak table which was only half-covered by the cloth. Joseph, inspired by a manservant's natural instinct, with no example to go upon, had already

hit upon the appropriate style befitting his new dignity; according to ritual he stood ceremoniously behind his master, waiting for the moment to serve the next course.

At this same table companies of noblemen had once upon a time made merry and caroused. The whole dining-room with its high, bright windows had been shaped and designed to harbour such a company. But Georg was not yet conscious of his loneliness; after all, at the officers' club in Vienna he had been lonely too and on a less munificent scale. These large halls were not too large; at any rate there was room to move about in them, and everywhere, invisibly present, were his ancestors whose blood coursed through his veins. They looked down upon him from the heavily gilt baroque frames in the dining-room. His grandfather was there, after whom he had been called, and many others in whose lineaments he found himself again. Protectingly they all looked down upon him while he took his meal, wondering perhaps how he would face his duties and manage the family property.

Since he had no children and was indifferent to his heirs, it seemed to him that, whatever his duties, their fulfilment concerned only himself and the dead who for centuries had borne his name. It was a pleasure for him to discharge them in the quiet and stillness of these surroundings. A clock was ticking incessant reminders of the irrevocable march of time. Peacefully, he went over in his mind all there was to be done to-morrow and the day after and during the coming weeks.

It was difficult, well-nigh impossible, to heat these large rooms adequately. But he was out during the day and he spent his evenings sitting over the large fire in the smoking-room. While the wind was wailing in the chimney it was pleasant to think that those burning logs had been chopped in his own wood. Now, for the first time in his life, he was meditating upon himself and his past existence. Coolly dissecting his self-conceit, he decided that all would go just as well in the regiment without him; his orderly would now deliver messages to another major: that was all.

In the same merciless fashion he endeavoured to reduce the unspoken tragedy of his married life to its proper proportions. When you came to think of it, what signified a human existence when measured in the vast scale of nature with which he was now in daily contact? Or even in comparison with a single wood full of old timber? But then he conjured up his wife before his eyes, and once again his cool vision was blurred and the old distress was upon him. A far longer course in loneliness and self-analysis would be required before *this* could be surmounted.

He buried himself in his library. Again the notion of subscribing to a newspaper flashed across his mind, only to be dismissed. So much that exercised the world seemed futile when viewed from here.

There was the farm, the state of the crops, the harvest; nothing else was important.

Now and again Eisengruber was asked to come round of an evening to discuss whatever business was on hand. On these occasions Georg liked to turn the conversation to agricultural matters in general to which very naturally his reading already inclined him. He was disappointed to find that Eisengruber was as uninterested in the philosophical background of the farmer's life as in modern theories and notions derived from books. His wish was only for improvements which he himself knew from experience to be desirable, and he was now content with seeing that in this respect the new squire was accommodating. To him, farming was no religion, nor was it his life's mission. To him it was merely a business concern, covering so many acres, which he hoped one day to transmit to his son in as flourishing a condition as possible. Yes, that was precisely what was wrong: his love of farming and of the land was intertwined with his love for the boy, his Toni; all his thoughts were centred in a future which was of no interest to the Major. And so their talks flagged and Georg realized that henceforth he would have to converse with the farmer outside, in the open fields, or in the sheds among concrete things that could be felt and seen. He discontinued these evening conversations and where formerly he had endeavoured to bridge the distance between them, he now deliberately increased it. It even worried him that youthful associations had forged a link between them; any allusion to them was at once discouraged.

When Freiherr von Hagel invited him to go shooting hares and pheasants with him, he accepted, not wishing at this early stage to appear a bad neighbour.

The rules of courtesy then prescribed that Freiherr von Hagel should be invited back on a shooting expedition. To Georg's dismay and fury his neighbour behaved as if he had been at home, pitilessly executing whatever was in reach of his gun.

The visit was rounded off with a game of chess which provided Georg with an opportunity for revenge. Although his opponent had a cryptic method of attack all his own, his king was speedily checkmated. It was a fortunate defeat: Freiherr von Hagel endeavoured to drown his discomfiture in impressive quantities of alcohol and the Major was relieved of the disagreeable necessity of having to refuse his neighbour's invitation next time. Freiherr von Hagel issued no more invitations.

Aigner, the young priest from Seekirchen, whose passion for chess only equalled his own, had now become his only guest. More was said during his first official visit about the respective advantages and drawbacks of the Italian, Spanish, and French openings than about the Holy Mass which he had been wont to celebrate once a month at

Maria-Licht. When finally the youthful ecclesiastic shyly admitted that the actual object of his visit had been to discuss a continuation of these monthly services, and was about to reinforce his plea with allusions to the piety of the workers on the farm, he was not even allowed to finish. Was it conceivable that Baron von Weygand would think of abandoning an ancient tradition? Obviously the services were to be continued, if only out of gratitude to the Church for having graciously consented to the erection of the family chapel. But on one condition, however: after Mass there was to be a game of chess!

The young priest was a trifle shocked. No doubt it was a pleasing thought after divine service to be sitting at a chess-board confronting a good player. Very pleasing indeed! But it was difficult for a chaplain to agree that Holy Mass should be made conditional upon a game of chess . . .

CHAPTER TWO

MIDSUMMER MADNESS

SPRING had arrived covering fields and meadows with a young and tender green. The old grey castle was now basking in a profusion of shimmering, sun-kissed pink and white blossom. In the large meadow behind the farm-house two colts had gambolled round their mother since Whitsuntide: calves were standing on their clumsy legs, staring vacantly into space. The hens were piloting their lately hatched brood about the farmyard. Pigeons were sweeping down from the cornice in a stream of blazing sunshine, bent upon filling their crops and providing for a hungry nest.

On the land and in the farm there was now so much work to be done that Hannerl and Trudi had to come and help for half-days; only the strict minimum was now done in the castle—it would get a thorough turning out in the autumn. The Major rode through the fields and woods to supervise the work in person. Some of it had to be carried out entirely under his instructions according to new theories recently culled from his books.

If the corn which had ripened to dark gold in the July sun had to be gathered in hastily before an oncoming storm, he would jump from his horse to lend a hand himself; together with the manservants and the maids in the field, he would lift the heavy sheaves and hurl them into the cart, where the farmer and one of the hands, dripping with sweat, were busy ramming them down under their feet, until the vehicle, laden to overflowing, could be driven off swaying and screeching to reach the threshing barn just before the first warm, heavy drops of rain came down.

Just as Georg was about to mount his horse, Hannerl, who felt less constrained in her master's presence than the others, came up to him with a jug of fresh must. "Now the Herr Baron has worked with us, he must drink with us too!"

Although his eyes were on Hannerl, as she raised her hot, smiling face towards him, Georg knew that the farm hands were grinning. He took the jug out of her hands, and the faintly mocking smiles died on the lips of his men: in their view, that he should have drunk with them was even more to his credit than that he should have given them a hand with the work.

This was his first summer for many years. He was aware of it himself. He was now living again. How long it was since he had felt like this. He had already gone for an hour's ride before sitting down to break-

fast; in the blazing heat of the afternoon, while his farm hands lay stretched out in the shadow, he gave himself no rest. He would even allow a thunderstorm from which man and beast sought shelter to cool his skin. He had never spared himself and had seldom known fatigue, but the deep joy he now felt at his work was something new to him. He was not particularly religious, but he thanked God for the late gift of this summer. It would have pleased him to have done all the work with his own hands; he could not refrain from seizing the scythe from the astonished hand of one of his Slovene reapers, and with a long sweeping stroke cut through the gleaming corn that gave off a sweet smelling odour as it fell rustling to his feet. It was with a jaundiced eye that he watched the young servant standing straddle-legged upon his cart as he rode out into the countryside to fetch the brimming milk-cans. Georg would have liked to do the ploughing and the sowing; there was within him a surplus activity and a passion for work, for which he could find no outlet.

By remaining in harness from morning till night, he tried to wear himself out. But his body was game to the last; it seemed to take delight in every fresh effort. The girls who saw him ride past them in the fields would remark to each other how sturdy and erect he sat in the saddle. How old could he be? Hannerl, who knew, let them guess; they all gave him more than the forty-nine years which was his actual age, but they went on to say that he certainly still had the strength and endurance of a young fellow.

Thereupon a question was asked by Trudi, and they all had to laugh so heartily that the farm hands who were working a little distance away looked round inquisitively wishing to know what all the fun was about. "It's about the Baron," said the girls teasingly. And the men, jealous and suspicious, warned them. "You girls be careful! To-day or to-morrow he will be after the skirts of one of you!" This sally only increased the laughter of the girls, as they looked roguishly in the direction of Hannerl, who blushed. "What are you all looking at me for? I don't mind telling you he's too old for me, Baron or no Baron." One of the men caught hold of her; it was Ferdinand, the son of the former farmer. "And what about me," he asked and tried to kiss her neck. But she shook him off, buttoned up her half-opened bodice and tossed her hair away from her angry eyes. The other girls felt as she did, and assumed a silent offended air. The men laughed and dragged Ferdinand off with them.

It had not remotely occurred to Georg that his personnel could ever discuss him in this fashion. He seldom paid attention to the girls. It was only when he noticed Hannerl among them that he could not restrain a vague smile, which all unawares seemed almost to establish an understanding between them. Since he had drunk with them in the field she had come closer to him than any of the others. Then

suddenly it crossed his mind that she had a real feeling for him. Certainly he felt invigorated by her buxom presence.

Upon the evening of St. John, when the fire of the old pagan festival of the summer solstice blazed up, he noticed how one of the men suddenly pressed her forward, compelling her to jump with him over the flames. It was Ferdinand, who had come back from America. His master said to himself that this Ferdinand had not made a bad choice; nobody need feel sorry for him if his proposal were accepted that night.

The long summer twilight sometimes filled Georg with a vague melancholy, such as he had not known during the previous winter. In the orchard behind the farm, to a silent spellbound audience of girls and menservants, the Slovene reapers would sing in three or four parts their endless heroic ballads, which expressed their sentimental longing for their poverty-stricken country far away beyond the sombre mountain range. Cicadas in their tens of thousands chirped shrill greetings to the rising moon, as it shed a strange magic over the familiar woodland. From the moat—which had long since ceased to be a moat—eerie misty shapes rose up to perform a noiseless saraband round the castle walls, while from the depths of the neighbouring wood the nightingale's song came loud and clear. The summer night had found its voice . . . Georg at the open window gazed and listened, and his thoughts went back to his wife till his eyes filled with tears. But it was time to go to bed; he got up. He was feeling tired after all; life lay behind him now. He had fondly imagined that he could work here with the rest like a young man; but though his frame was strong enough still, he could no longer claim the attributes of youth. Creative work, work steeped in the joy of the senses, belonged to the young. At best he would be allowed to supervise, to keep order.

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Autumn came. Once more Hannerl and Trudi were at work all day in the castle and since there was so much to do, they again received help from the farm for several days on end. During these cleaning activities, Hannerl had automatically taken the lead: she was older than Trudi, and the other girls silently recognized her authority.

In his heart of hearts Joseph could not fail to rejoice in this happy turn of events. No more was needed of him than a kind of silent supervision, which though not taken very seriously by the maids, could not fail to impress the Baron, that perfect disciplinarian. All went very well, and Joseph was not far from believing that this was the result of his own genius for organization. Unfortunately Trudi never ceased to bring him back to a sense of realities. She alone refused to put up with Hannerl's tyranny. Being more or less engaged to Joseph, or so she thought, she did not feel the necessity to restrain herself in front of him. She could not understand, she said, how he

could put up with Hannerl's high-handed ways. After all it was he who had been instructed to issue orders to the staff. A little doubtfully he promised her that he would speak to Hannerl about her behaviour—but not before all this belated spring cleaning had been got over . . . "But then it won't be necessary any longer," said Trudi, angry and dissatisfied.

She also held forth to the other girls, but they saw through her: Trudi was only standing up for Joseph's authority because Hannerl's masterly interference had abolished it entirely. All the same, they were amazed at times at Hannerl's unflagging zeal . . . Was she so keen upon ingratiating herself with the Baron?

By this time, however, it had not escaped Georg that there was something amiss with Joseph's authority; nor could he fail to notice that if the house was run so smoothly it was only thanks to Hannerl. He would have liked to reward her services, but he did not wish to make the others envious, which would have been far from pleasant for Hannerl herself. He had to content himself therefore with expressing his satisfaction by his whole bearing, and this she appeared to consider an abundant reward. More than ever she surrounded him with her attentions, and in the end, Georg became aware that her devotion to him found expression in all manner of services which more properly belonged to Joseph's province. It had now become Joseph's main occupation to sit with his Trudi on a little bench in the kitchen, with his arm round her shoulders. Anna Krone was thoroughly exasperated with them. She kept reminding them of their duties to the Baron, only to receive a cutting reply from Trudi and a lecture from Joseph. At last she poured her heart out to Hannerl. This temperamental young woman turned upon Trudi and told her exactly what she thought of her. Trudi in her turn was not slow in giving her a piece of her mind. The upshot was that an enmity grew up between them, which became more exacerbated every day. Joseph discovered that fate had placed him between the devil and the deep sea.

Joseph entreated and adjured, but all in vain: Trudi refused to keep calm. Repeatedly she provoked scenes, the echo of which could not fail to reach the Major's ears some time or other. In anxious suspense, Joseph saw the day coming when he would be summoned upstairs to the library, as the person responsible. Nothing happened, however. Joseph, who thought he understood his master, was at a loss to know why he should have wished to spare him. It did not occur to him that the Major was in truth only trying to save Hannerl from unpleasantnesses, and had not given Joseph a thought.

One morning while Georg was changing after his ride, and sponging himself down with cold water, Hannerl innocently walked into the room. In her fright she dropped the jug she was holding in her hands and rushed out.

He had not even the time to seize a towel. Embarrassed and put out, he looked in the direction of the slammed door. The devil take her, why hadn't she knocked? He glanced at the fragments on the floor, then looked up and stared at himself disapprovingly in the looking-glass of the wash-stand. He saw a hard furrowed face with a grey moustache and badly shaven chin; a neck still smeared over in soap and a powerful chest covered with frizzy greying hair: all told it seemed to him a terrifying sight for a young woman. It was not surprising that she had fled from the room in a panic. He picked up a coarse towel and rubbed himself down.

When he next met her, he did his best to see the humorous side of the whole episode. He advised her in her own interest to knock another time before coming into the room. She flushed scarlet saying that she always did, but that upon this occasion she had not heard him come home. And now to make matters worse she had broken the jug as well. . . . She turned to go with unconcealed embarrassment, and while he was amused at her concern for the unfortunate jug, he made sure that after this adventure she would not give him another glance.

He was not mistaken. During the next few days it was obvious that she avoided his presence. On the other hand he found that he could no longer keep her entirely out of his mind when she was working in an adjoining room. As she passed him by with downcast eyes, he had every opportunity of observing her: he would timidly size her up from the corner of his eye, the challenge of her youthful figure, the full curve of her shoulders, her ruddy neck, half-concealed in the delicate curls of her blonde hair. During his long and lonely rides, his anxiety and confusion increased daily, and he fought with his physical longings. What was he coming to? Was he going to forget himself with a maid? Apart from everything else, he could only be an old foggy in her eyes. He was nothing but an old fool, who should keep his eyes from what doubtless already belonged to one of his young servants. He was revolted with himself. These were the lusts of an ageing satyr, and he would burn them out of his flesh. But there was a treacherous fragrance in the autumn woods which had set his blood on fire. Soon winter would be there, covering the earth with cool virgin snow, and that would be the end of this autumnal orgy.

For him too the winter was coming. He reminded himself of the fact as a warning to commit no further follies which would dishonour him. But perhaps it was precisely this premonition of his approaching winter which was arousing a fierce longing within him to feel life streaming through him once again, to celebrate the feast of autumn. There was now a hunger in his blood, and he feared that it would prove stronger than his pride, his honour, his paltry wisdom. Day by day, hour by hour, he felt danger drawing nearer. During sleepless

and perturbed nights he forgot that she was a servant girl. "Hannerl . . . !" he softly whispered to himself.

Was she aware of nothing? Sometimes he was convinced that she knew. If she kept her eyes downcast before him, it could no longer be because of that one isolated incident—it must be that she felt his burning glance upon her. Was she waiting for him to take the first step? While her glance continued to evade his, she was about him even more than before. What was she really after? Was she merely scalp-hunting? Had she made up her mind to let him have his way only because he was the master? If that were all, he would thank her for it by turning her out the very next morning. But he was gradually coming to believe that she shared his feeling. Her voice now sounded different in his ears. It was veiled and constrained; it had the quality of her downcast look. Upon one occasion he caught her hastily wiping her heated forehead, and then, as if by an irresistible compulsion, her eyes met his again.

His heart stood still, then he said to her, "Hannerl, there is something I want to say to you. . . ." Her face was ashen pale as she at last met his eyes squarely.

But what had he to say to her? Oh! he knew quite well, and while a momentary panic counselled a last minute escape, he realized that there was no salvation. True, he might have enquired whether things were now any better between herself and Trudi, but the cowardice of it repelled him; the question refused to shape itself. Slowly, with anxious faithful eyes, she was already obeying his summons. She whispered something, but he could not grasp it. He seized her hand; it felt cold. Speechless she sank on his breast. He kissed her. She lifted her head and returned his kiss, and her breath was hot upon him. "Hannerl," he said huskily. Childlike happiness and surprise suffused her face; she smiled. "Where are the others?" he asked, looking about him with a dazed expression.

"The others," she mumbled, as she fixed him with a deep strange stare, "the others are downstairs in the kitchen."

The following day the storm broke between her and Trudi. It was only thanks to Hannerl that the explosion had not occurred much sooner. She had usually refrained from giving vent to her rancour until the evening when they were below in the kitchen, and the Major was no longer within earshot. But upon this occasion apparently, it was her wish that at long last Georg should witness the struggle. She launched the attack while she was busy with Trudi in his room, and he was expected back from his morning ride at any moment. She had thrown all reserve to the winds, and Trudi, swept off her feet by these new tactics, burst into tears just as her master was walking into the room. Hannerl controlled herself remarkably well, saying only

that she could no longer work together with Trudi, and that besides she did not require help every day in cleaning up the few rooms the Herr Baron now occupied; once in the week would be quite enough. Trudi, realizing that she was going to get the worst of it, decided to save her pride, saying that in that case she would be the one to go since she was the youngest. She was weeping, but was not quite sure herself whether from anger at her mortification or because she would now no longer be seeing Joseph in the kitchen downstairs.

Thus Hannerl had got a potential spy out of the way, and certainly things really seemed to go just as well without Trudi. Hannerl had always been hard working, but now she became indefatigable. The maid who came to help her on Saturdays declared that it was as if the very devil were on her tracks; she went plodding on and on, and if she ever opened her mouth at all, it was only to issue an order: this corner had not yet been cleaned out, or that curtain was hanging awry!

In the long autumn and winter evenings there was much chattering among the girls in the farm-house on the subject of Hannerl's strange behaviour. They could not make out what had come over her. She used to be a light-hearted girl, always ready for a laugh. . . . Had pride suddenly gone to her head? Trudi gave them clearly to understand that she knew more about Hannerl than she cared to say, and of course this dark insinuation was tantamount to a full revelation. They pricked up their ears, their eyes were bulging wide. Under the low beams of the large farm kitchen, where they were all sitting round the hearth, the air was tense with excitement. "But do you really think . . .?" "Think!" hissed Trudi. "But did you hear anything or see something . . .?" Trudi, however, was not prepared to say more. Disappointed, and irritated, the girls stared at her. The men, bitterly justified in their former suspicions, said jeeringly, "Well, didn't we tell you so?"

A little later they all began to tease Ferdinand, who had once so persistently tried his luck with Hannerl. The rejected lover, however, kept his feelings to himself and shrugged his shoulders. "Ah! well," he said, "I can't stand up to a Baron. I am only a farmer's son." This was not very tactful of Ferdinand. After all he was now only a farm hand like the rest of them. That his father had once been the farmer here did not make him better than they were; rather the contrary in fact. They despised him because he still could not refrain from boasting about that father of his.

Whatever truth there might be in Trudi's mysterious insinuations, there was certainly nothing in the Major's conduct to arouse suspicion. He went for his long ride every morning through wood and field, and spent the afternoons and evenings as usual, shut up in his library where he read or dealt with his correspondence. Every time his men

caught sight of him they were more convinced that Trudi had been romancing.

On her side Hannerl avoided everything that might lead to gossip. She was careful not to work in a room in which her master happened to be. In the mornings while he was out she dusted his library, so that there was no need for her to be there in the afternoon. If they met by chance she hastily passed him by with averted face, and a smile on her lips. He too was silent on such occasion, for all the smouldering fire within him—and when he heard them in the passage, it was waste of time for Joseph to have his eye riveted to the keyhole.

Hannerl spent the evenings as before with Krone and his wife in the kitchen, and when Joseph returned from the farm, where he had been visiting Trudi, he still found her up mending the Major's woollen vests and socks. She seemed in no hurry to retire earlier than the others. Every evening Joseph, egged on by Trudi, was on the point of passing some withering remark about this mending of the Major's underwear. But in the first place Trudi herself had often done the same work in the evening, and besides Hannerl and Frau Krone were usually first in the field, teasing him about his expeditions through storms, darkness, snow and ice.

Only when Anna Krone was preparing to go to bed herself, and was shaking her husband out of his sleep as he lay dozing in his chair by the stove, did Hannerl begin to collect her mending. Slowly, wearily, she then stumped her way up the staircase. But when all was very quiet below she slipped in her night-dress, and barefooted, along the dark passage to where her middle-aged lover was waiting for her. Unable for the last hour to concentrate his thoughts upon his reading, he now folded her in his arms with all the recovered passion of his youth.

Sometimes a feeling of bewilderment came over Georg at the thought that he had been able to settle down quietly to this new life without too many self-reproaches. Was it because he was living here far from any great city, and had lost contact with people of his own class? He was inclined to think it very natural that Hannerl should wait upon him as a maid by day, while obeying the man in him at night. But the world would surely blame him, not only for thus paying homage to an old seigniorial right, but for what would also be considered as a gross and tasteless offence to the memory of her whose name should never more cross his lips.

Mere words, however, were not likely to make an impression upon him. What did he care if he was now besmirching a memory and shamelessly forgetting, here, away from the world, what he owed to his name and to his class? He was filled with a foolish tempestuous pride: he was the proud possessor of this young woman's body; even though it were a servant's, its glory and its warm devotion held all his

senses enthralled. He felt a fulfilment of the senses that he had never known before. Only now had it become clear to him that his marriage had never been what a marriage could and should be; it had been a protracted mistake. If he had anything to reproach himself with, it was rather that he had embittered Elisabeth's life too by harbouring for fifteen years the delusion that she had to be *his* wife and not another's.

After having tried for fifteen years to flout the laws of nature, to her detriment as well as to his own, by seeking to bind a woman to himself who had, with equal pertinacity, fought for her own personal freedom, he had now found happiness without any strain in humbly bowing his head to these same natural laws. When he asked his wife to marry him, he was still animated by exalted notions on the subject of love; perhaps, even a month ago, he was still clinging to a set of empty notions which he now cast aside as so much stage property. Now his senses were happy and a deep peace he had never before known came over him.

Perhaps the source of his greatest pride and joy was his awareness that Hannerl too was carrying this same happiness about with her. He could see it upon her when she slipped by him with that mysterious radiant smile playing upon her mouth. So obvious was it that words between them were superfluous. Even at night they avoided conversation. His authority was left unimpaired when she faltered an endearing term and then broke off. In a full sentence she could not have failed to address him as her master; she preferred to be silent, raising her lips for him to kiss her, and doing him homage with the warm and full intoxication of her passionate young body.

He knew that he could rely entirely upon her discretion, and upon her innate feminine cunning; the secret would be well kept. This made it easy for him to maintain an attitude of unconcern towards the staff. Only once suspicion crossed his mind when he met young Ferdinand alone in the wood, and addressed a few words to him, which were answered with a curious asperity. The whole of the following day he could not get this encounter out of his mind. He remembered that it was this Ferdinand who on the Eve of St. John had unexpectedly seized Hannerl by the waist, and compelled her to jump over the bonfire with him. Was there a connection here? As he thought it over anger flared up within him. He had a mind to call the fellow to account. Unfortunately the rascal hadn't used a single word that would have justified his taking him by the scruff of the neck; it had only been something undefinable in his tone and manner. In any case he had got his warning and would be on the look-out next time. As a matter of fact he almost regretted upon this occasion this relationship of master and man. He would have preferred a frank explanation as from one man to another.

The same night Hannerl whispered to him in tears and excitement, that the previous evening, after everybody had gone to bed, Joseph had secretly slunk upstairs to spy out the land. Georg was startled, but recovered himself. So it was like that. His personnel knew. It remained now to be seen whether any of them would have the audacity to let it appear before him that they knew. It would then be a question of saying "And from whom have you got to know? Oh, it's Frau Krone, is it?"

He knew exactly how to deal with this man Joseph. He summoned him to the library, and just fixed him with an almost roguish stare and much wagging of the head until Joseph felt the ground sink beneath his feet, and swallowed nervously. Only then did his master address him. He began by noting the fact that country life seemed to be having a strange effect upon Joseph. First to become engaged to one girl, and then to slink up to the bedroom of another at dead of night! Really, it was very much to the credit of Hannerl that she had not decided to expose him publicly on the spot. But no, she had been sensible enough merely to appeal to her master for protection. Well, forewarned was forearmed. Joseph had better watch his step! The scene ended with a formidable, familiar slap on the shoulder of the Don Juan, who, almost collapsing under the blow, tottered dizzily from the room.

Hannerl was sure that this evening Joseph would scarcely dare give her a look, and as for slinking upstairs at night, of that there would be no more question. Anna Krone was given a wink. She had just been telling her of the amusing way the Herr Baron had read Joseph a lesson. She was on a curious footing of passive understanding with Anna Krone. She did not doubt for a moment that her friend knew. Nevertheless the two of them comported themselves with one another as if all this gossip about the Major was only base slander. She was sure Anna Krone would maintain this view to everybody, including her husband.

Meanwhile the trick that had been played upon Joseph had unexpected consequences that were none too pleasant to Hannerl. In one way or another something must have leaked out of Joseph's nocturnal expedition, for now the astonishing rumour spread that he was secretly having an affair with both girls. When it reached Trudi's ears she did not contradict it. Perhaps she had spread the rumour herself. Now the eyes of all were opened; how could they ever seriously have believed that there could have been anything between Hannerl and the Herr Baron?

When Joseph turned up at the farm of an evening, he was received with scornful looks. What could be the matter? When he questioned Trudi, she said she was as ignorant as himself. He could not think what possessed her or what all the others had against him. The fact

was that Trudi believed she had discovered how she could wound Hannerl. That she had been highly successful was apparent from Hannerl's rage when the girl who came to work at the castle every Saturday asked her point blank whether she were not ashamed to filch away somebody else's sweetheart.

That evening Georg was made aware for the first time that Hannerl had her freaks of humour. She wept, pretended to be unhappy, and yet was not to be persuaded to speak. His first thought was to attribute her tears to another cause, and the mere possibility of this greatly upset him. In his married life such tears had never fallen. His suspicion however was immediately allayed when he enquired delicately into the matter. Meanwhile Hannerl's capriciousness had gradually made him awaken from a deep dream. He now for the first time, and with a terrifying clarity, began to have a premonition that the adventure into which his senses had driven him was coming to a sad and unavoidable end.

Time and again he had pressed Hannerl to accept some money with which she could buy something for herself which would give her pleasure. She became almost angry about it. But now suddenly she was trying to take advantage of his feelings for her by talking about a small golden necklace she had seen in Klagenfurt a few weeks before, when she and Anna Krone had driven to the market. The little chain and pendant hardly cost a hundred crowns, but he was afraid that it was something that was not worn in the country, at any rate not by a peasant girl, and somewhat petulantly she admitted that herself. Did she not realize then that every one would guess at once from whom she had received it?

Georg could not know that this was just what she wanted. She was still smarting under the general suspicion that she was spending her nights not in the arms of her master but of his Viennese servant, and so she had been seized with a longing for this costly gold necklace, to which Anna Krone had smilingly drawn her attention, with the mischievously flattering remark that it would look so well upon her. If she could only wear the little gold chain on Sunday when the chaplain came to read Mass, and every one was assembled in the little chapel, nobody could say again that she was a servant's sweetheart. So she had spoken to her master about it with an assumed casualness. She was afraid to ask for it bluntly, but she thought that she had other means at her disposal to make him realize how seriously she meant it.

She rose several times that night and stole along the dark passage that led to the large bedroom, only to retire once more hastily to her little room. She was trembling all over in feverish expectation. A foolish hope took possession of her. Perhaps he would come to her if she did not go to him. This would be so great a victory that she was

prepared to brave his wrath although she still feared him as her master. She could not imagine how she would behave if he were suddenly to come into her room. Perhaps she would fling herself, remorsefully upon his breast; perhaps she would hide her head under the blankets, and when he had pulled them off, say in a humble begging tone, "Let me buy the little gold chain—I want it. . . ."

But when he did not come it became clear to her that she had foolishly expected a miracle. If she had had the courage she would have liked still to slip out and join him now.

She did not sleep a wink all night. Sometimes the old pride swept over her. She knew she was young and desirable, and her lover, no matter what he was, might at least have come along to enquire whether there was anything wrong. Next morning she would tell him what she thought of his callousness. But she had hardly made up her mind to do this when other feelings became uppermost. She felt very small and very weak, and in self-pity drenched her pillow with her tears.

Georg too had a bad night. He remained awake a long time. When he found she had remained away half an hour longer than her usual time for coming, he knew that two alternatives now confronted him: either he had to put an end to his idyll, or go to her little room, and from that moment assume the role of the doddering fool for whom no humiliation was too great. After hours of struggling he found the strength not to go, and although his decision filled him with a dull ache, he still was sufficiently imbued with his soldier's self-control to get towards the morning the few hours' sleep which he had prescribed for himself.

Hannerl sensed in a moment what was awaiting her when Joseph entered the kitchen the following day, with the message that the Major wished to speak to her. She cast a hasty glance in the small looking-glass that was nailed on the door, and saw that there were circles round her eyes. She gave Anna Krone a strange vacant look and hurried out. Anxious and astonished, her friend stared after her as she went; the whole morning she had been filled with undefinable premonitions.

The Major looked up at her as she entered the room, but to her own surprise she was able to endure his glance—they had suddenly become strangers to one another. In a tone she must have known once upon a time, but oh! so long ago, he said he had come to the conclusion that for her sake she could no longer remain in the castle. Hannerl nodded silently, looking into space. Yes, that was exactly what she had been expecting. He then asked her whether she would accept a parting gift from him. He only wanted everything to be comfortable for her, so that she would not have to be in a hurry to look out for something else. He handed her an envelope; she put

out her hand and took it, as she would have accepted any humiliation at this moment.

Then an embarrassed silence fell between them. It was almost a physical pain for her to feel behind the superficial mask of control he had imposed upon himself, her master's profound distress and above all his struggle not to say one word too many. There was no word of consolation that might have wounded her, no question that might have betrayed his weakness. Just for a moment the foolish thought flashed across her mind that everything could not suddenly come to an end like this, and with her eyes she tried to convey this to him. But no, she saw clearly he refused to understand her, and her disappointment threatened to turn to hysterical protest. She felt the blood rising to her cheeks. She felt like heaping abusive reproaches upon him. First he had taken her, and now he thought he could turn her out of doors like a dog before the eyes of all! This was what she wanted to say to him, but she could not come out with it, because she was conscious deep down inside that she had not given herself a moment's rest until she was in his arms. Besides she was herself to blame for this miserable ending; in her fatal attempt to clear herself of the indignity put upon her by others she had brought it upon herself. There would have been something theatrical in her turning upon him angrily and then stamping out of the room, which would only have elicited from him a bitter smile.

She got her things together, and muttering as she went, flung into the kitchen to bid her friend good-bye. "Good-bye, I'm off," was all she said to Frau Krone, who looked at her aghast—"Where are you off to?"—"I wish I knew myself"—"But you will let me hear something of you?" implored Anna Krone. But Hannerl was already out of the kitchen.

As with hurried footsteps she crossed the little courtyard, Hannerl knew her late lover was watching her from behind the window. She tried hard not to look round, but as she reached the gateway leading into the farm, she turned her head to the place where Georg von Weygand, hidden, holding his breath, was watching her depart. Such was their final leave-taking.

She caught sight of Ferdinand loitering on the farm. She went straight up to him and said, "I have been sacked." For a brief second he was unable to open his mouth, then immediately his mind was made up. "All right, then we go together." That was what she had expected. She had known with what grim persistency he had pursued her for months on end, and now he had won after all. While realizing this she was also aware that she had delivered herself up to his mercy. This was the price she had to pay for her defeat. He knew it too and began at once to dispose of her person. "To-morrow I am taking you to Klagenfurt. I know of something there for you; I can find work


there myself with a coal merchant, if I choose; but we shall see about that later. Ask the farmer if he will let us take the cart up to town—he won't refuse that to you."

Hannerl nodded, ready to do his bidding in all things. Here was a man who wanted her, and who had already not shrunk from enduring humiliations for her sake. He admitted as much that same night after she had meekly crept up to him, and abandoned herself to his triumphant lust. "I was sick long ago of having to go on playing the servant to that fellow over there in his castle, but so long as you were there inside I had to let myself be trampled upon. I knew that one day you would fall into my clutches . . ." He gave a hoarse laugh, and she kissed him, thankful for his tenacity.

She also handed him the envelope she had received from her former master. She herself had not yet looked to see what it had contained; but Ferdinand tore it open greedily, and sitting up in his straw bed began to count up the bank-notes with many a coarse oath.

"He seems to have been well pleased with you, this boss of yours," he scoffed cynically; a wild ache was raging within him. He seized her roughly, only relaxing his grip when she began to cry softly. His own eyes filled with tears as he stared at her, hating her.

She ran a trembling hand over his hair, caressingly, consolingly. He began to sob convulsively, and this brought release. She called him by his name, the name he had not heard since he had played there as a boy, as the farmer's youngest son. "Nandl . . .!" she wailed.



CHAPTER THREE

A RECEPTION IN THE SNOW

THE following Sunday Father Aigner paid his monthly visit to Maria-Licht. Actually he had not been seen for three months. He had been laid up and his face still bore traces of his long illness. He was accustomed to receiving a hearty welcome, but upon this occasion the Major betrayed such undisguised pleasure at his arrival that something approaching suspicion arose in the mind of the youthful ecclesiastic. Was it such relief not to have to spend Sunday alone? During Mass he came quietly to a decision. It had long been at the back of his mind, but he felt that now the time was ripe to carry it out. He would see about it after the midday meal.

On the farm also everybody was delighted with the priest's recovery. He was generally liked and it was difficult to say whether such full attendances in chapel were due primarily to regard for the Lord of the Manor, or to religious feeling, or merely in order to give pleasure to Father Aigner. Two young labourers acted as acolytes; Magdalena Eisengruber was in charge of the somewhat squeaky organ (she was from the town, a verger's daughter). Everything was conducted in rather primitive fashion, but the friendly intimacy of this monthly service was felt to be more inspiring than a high mass in the village church. Without knowing it themselves, all the girls were more or less in love with the youthful ecclesiastic, and preferred to confess their sins to him rather than to the old village priest. It was pleasing for them to see him again in his splendid vestments. Having got the two boys who had assisted him to fold up his cassock and extinguish the candles. Chaplain Aigner slipped something into their hands and followed his host to the library, where they usually had a glass of old Tokay together before the midday meal.

After dinner the chess board was produced. They both played badly, but the priest at any rate could excuse himself on the ground of his recent illness, whereas the Major could allege no valid pretext for having left twice in succession an important piece uncovered. The moment had now arrived for the priest to launch an attack of an entirely different order.

"And to think that you have had the whole winter here to think out ways and means of defeating me! But seriously, how do you contrive to get through these long months?"

"I have my books," said Georg somewhat curtly. But the priest did not seem to be very impressed with this explanation. "Books!"

he cried. Georg just stared at him. Had the good man not been able to withstand the strong wine at table after his illness? A curious light had come into his eyes, and it looked very much as if he were inclined to say more but was in some difficulty about it.

"My dear Baron, you are not going to tell me that books are going to prevent these winter months from hanging rather heavily upon a lonely bachelor."

Now Georg was sure of it. Something must have reached his ear about Hannerl. But to listen to gossip was one thing; to have the audacity to refer to it in this room was another. He tried to assume a jocular tone: "Are you about to tell me that I ought to get married again?"

The priest was not to be put off. "Perhaps! Being alone does not agree with you. There is still so much you could do: you have the energy for it, and there's something almost patriarchal about you . . . Don't laugh. I mean it. While I was ill in bed such thoughts were often in my mind, and I decided I must tell you."

Georg was looking into space. The faint smile about his mouth was meant to conceal the unexpected and strange feelings the other had aroused in him. He would have given a great deal to know whether Father Aigner had come to hear something of his amorous adventure. But he decided to put an end to the subject. "In any case I thank you for your kind intentions, Father, but I fear you will have to accustom yourself to being the guest of a bachelor." And while the younger man continued silent, the Major went on to say casually, "I might have a break before the winter is over, and visit Graz where I was in garrison once upon a time; I have an old friend still living there."

Georg himself was surprised that this notion should have occurred to him at this very moment. Nothing had been farther from his mind a minute before—to go once more to Graz where his first regiment was stationed, and to find out whether his old comrade Otto von Sterneck, with whom he had been to the cadet school, was still among the living. Was this the young priest's doing? Or was it because of Hannerl that he had to go away? Perhaps it was only Hannerl. He could not keep her out of his mind. She was still about him night and day; it was enough to drive him mad.

Father Aigner was vaguely conscious that in one way or another he had achieved something after all, and decided to rest content with this result. He got up to go.

"I will take you home," said the Major, and Joseph was instructed to tell Krone to bring up the carriage. This was indeed a great privilege, to be attributed, so the priest thought, to his recent illness, for except in very bad weather it had so far never occurred to his host to have him fetched or taken home in the carriage. The young

priest's house was situated on the outskirts of Seekirchen, and perhaps his host considered that a three-quarters of an hour's walk through the wood, beguiled with pious thoughts, could do no harm.

On the journey home the grateful priest tried to choose topics of conversation that might interest the Major, but conversation was made difficult by the lurching and screeching of the old coach on the bad road. Besides his host seemed to be absorbed in his thoughts, immersed in the wintry, wooded landscape on either side of the road.

On his way back, Georg realized how he was beginning to look forward to this little trip to Graz. Would it come off? Old memories rose up in confusing variety. In Graz he had been a young man, sub-lieutenant, lieutenant. There on spring evenings he used to sit with his friend Otto in the garden of the Officers' Club, both of them in brand-new uniforms, and while over their heads the chestnuts were in bloom, they drank the young wine and philosophized about the service, about life, about women. Then came the campaign against Italy and Prussia; Custozza and Villafranca bound them for life, so they thought. For many years they exchanged New Year's greetings. What would Otto be like now? Would their meeting be a disappointment? It was almost impossible: Otto was one of his own kind; at once, even without a word he had felt he was a comrade.

Later on he had also come to know Elisabeth in Graz. By then he was already thirty and she was not yet twenty. On his side it had been a case of love at first sight, but he was not the kind of man who knows at once how to establish contact with a woman. Finally with Otto's help he had been successful in getting himself introduced, and even then he almost spoilt his chances by his clumsiness. Looking back now it all seemed pretty good to him. He had been unfair to her in forgetting how she was in those early days in Graz when he made her acquaintance. That was long before the days when she could not think or talk of anything but of going to Vienna, Vienna, always Vienna . . .

He became aware that upon this journey home Hannerl was not in his thoughts. It was the first time; but then as he stepped into the library and told Joseph to light the candles, the bleak thought flashed through his mind again that he could go on reading till midnight, and even later; he would then have to retire to his lonely couch in the back room: she would not be waiting for him.

. . .

That very evening he wrote to his old friend Otto. He thought it was going to be a long letter, but although he felt deeply moved as he set pen to paper he was not able to fill more than a small page. The page contained scarcely more than a matter-of-fact report of his widowhood, the death of his uncle and his retirement from the army. "As somebody has got to run this show, I have now taken to farming and shooting, and have become a recluse; but all this will probably

not interest you very much. For my part I should like to see you again. If you feel the same, write and let me know when I can look you up."

The following day he himself carried this letter to Seekirchen, and with daily growing excitement, he waited for the reply. Then he reckoned out that a reply could not yet have arrived, and he felt ashamed of his impatience. For years Otto had been entirely out of his thought, and now suddenly he could not bear to wait an hour for news. Perhaps his friend had been transferred to another regiment. Yes, it was a mistake to do without a newspaper.

The reply came when he had almost given up hope. Otto was still in Graz. "Dear old Georg," he wrote, "I have just returned from Vienna (which included an audience at Schönbrunn!) and have found your letter. I am glad that one of us at least had had the sense to write; otherwise we would probably have had to wait until we reached Valhalla before falling into each other's arms. I had been asking for your address in Vienna, but they told me that there was no point in my trying to write, because in those remote fastnesses of yours the last postman had been devoured by cannibals, post bag and all. I also heard while I was there of your wife's death. I can remember how happy you once were, and realize what a blow it must have been. I won't reproach you for not having let me know; I am a sinner myself. I don't suppose you even know that I got married six years ago, after having given myself a reputation as a hardened bachelor. My wife and I will expect you here for Christmas—by order, mind! Her name is Julia, and I hope you will approve of my choice. You will celebrate New Year's Even with the regiment of which you were the ornament for twenty years. You will be amazed to find how you are still remembered. Brancovic, Reissnitz and Kolman you will see as large as life; Weigl and Hartung have been transferred; Kehr, poor soul, is dead. Now let us hear from you soon. My wife, who has heard me tell wonders of you, embraces you in anticipation; she can hardly bear to wait so long to see you—Yours—Otto."

He was moved; a warm feeling crept over him. His eyes moistened with unexpected pleasure. He read the letter again at leisure: the first time he had only run through it, hungrily. One does not need many friends in this world, provided one can rely upon one.

Joseph was dispatched to the post office with a telegram and instructed to examine the wardrobe and to get everything necessary for a week's absence. Nor was he to forget the Major's dress uniform. Joseph brought back from the post office a pile of newspapers addressed to the Major, who had just started a subscription. He used to make out that they were not worth getting and now he was going to read them all. He began arranging them according to date. Judging from some small markings, he had a suspicion that his servant had already

perused them before him. This he felt to be not only an unseemly liberty, for which Joseph would have to be called to account, but almost as a robbery of news, which here at Maria-Licht belonged to the master before any one else. Until far past midnight he wandered like a lost soul through the welter of the world's events. In the space of a few hours he was trying to make up for a year's neglect.

Strange; it seemed not very difficult for him to find his bearings. He read the news, and imagined that he had read it all before. It also seemed to him as if, after this year of isolation, everything had become clearer and assumed a simpler outline. He read about the immoderate demands of the Czechs, who wished to speak their own language in their own country and have political equality with the Hungarians. The faithful government organ to which he had subscribed was getting quite excited about it, and Georg remembered how the attitude of the Czechs used to exasperate him too. He felt it almost as a personal discourtesy towards the old emperor, who in all conscience had worries enough in his large realm. But now a small still voice within him was saying, "They may be right after all from their own point of view; they have their own proud history as an independent kingdom. If it were at all possible these wishes should be met. Nothing is more dangerous than discontent inside one's own frontiers."

Industriously he perused the foreign news. There too nothing had changed. The young German Reich, born of a military triumph, still felt itself irresistible, and was challenging England with its cheaper goods, with which it was bent upon conquering the world market. Russia, whose friendship had been steadily maintained by the wisdom and prudence of Bismarck, was now, after his dismissal, openly veering in its sympathies towards France, which since 1870 had been seeking a strong ally and was ready to pay for one. The Emperor William, however, had always felt it due to his own prestige to eliminate the great statesman to whom he was beholden for his Empire. What was the future towards which he was now leading it? Germany would have to face two hostile frontiers. The paper was right: henceforth Germany was linked in bonds of brotherhood to the dual monarchy, at any rate so long as the old Emperor over there in Schönbrunn remained alive. And for this very reason, it could not rely too much upon the alliance of Italy, Austria's hereditary enemy. Yes, this Europe in which people wished to live in peace and quiet and cultivate their fields continued to be a volcano.

Turning away from politics he became engrossed in the miscellaneous news. His eye fell upon the notice of his Viennese Colonel's death . . . Order of Maria-Theresa . . . Order of Leopold with the Swords . . . Custozza . . . It was at Custozza that Georg himself had won the only medal to which he attached any importance. That day he was

far from thinking that this year 1866 would become such a bitter memory for Austria's arms.

He read of a collision in the Ottakringer Hauptstrasse, of a sensational suicide in Viennese society, of a duel with a tragic ending. At the opera they were now playing nothing but the musical dramas of that German composer, Wagner, who had recently died, and who now was considered a genius after having been wildly decried as a charlatan. So Georg had been right after all! From sheer curiosity he once attended one of the first performances of the *Valkyrie*, and after each act he applauded with enthusiasm, merely to annoy those around him who were hysterically hissing and booing. He had not understood much of this new-fangled music, so full of barbarous clangour and brass.

And so in France they were trying to fly? Ever since the war in Indio-China it was thought that future armies would one day fight each other in the air. Well, nothing was impossible under the sun, but if it should ever come to that, all the textbooks on strategy now in use would have to be burnt as so much waste paper. In America, Edison was still proceeding with his inventions. Mankind was almost incapable of keeping abreast of them all. Then there was Barnum and Bailey, who were exhibiting the cave man to their public; evidently he was not yet quite as dead as the Dodo.

When things became too much for him he went to bed. The following morning he was able to set out confident that nobody in Graz would now ask him with a look of astonishment how many years it was since he had seen a newspaper. But when you came to think of it, it really was not important whether one read them or not—he had been able to convince himself of that once more. But he was delighted at the thought of seeing his old friend Otto again the day after to-morrow, and the garden of the Officers' Club at Graz, where they had once upon a time drunk wine together and talked about things that no longer seemed important.

The inmates of the castle were never to know how the Major spent those ten days in Graz. To judge from a photograph which he brought back from his trip he must have had a good time. It represented a richly decorated officers' mess, where he had been given a place of honour. Joseph, who had pored over it with the greatest attention, concluded from the expression on the faces that they had had difficulty in retaining their dignified composure during the short pause that was necessary.

A renewal of energy seemed to radiate from Georg since his return; perhaps also a certain restlessness which he tried to conceal under much activity. He was kept rather busy replying to the New Year's wishes which had reached him during his absence from the Corporations of Seekirchen, of which in succession to his uncle he had

become the protector. Moreover he wrote long mysterious letters, about which it was impossible to know anything.

Joseph observed all this with astonishment. Besides, Joseph himself was restless these days, but he had his own reasons for that. After Hannerl's departure one of the girls from the farm had taken her place. Not a word had been exchanged on the subject. The Major had behaved as if he had not so much as noticed such an important change in personnel. But if the master was satisfied with the present state of things, it was not to the liking of Joseph. He was brooding over something. Every evening he discussed the matter with Trudi, who was gradually beginning to reproach him with not daring to act; but he restrained her impatience, reminding her that to be over hasty might spoil everything. It was all a question of timing, and while waiting for the suitable moment, Joseph was closely studying the face of the Major, to him so impenetrable.

He had now got it into his head that something out of the way must have happened to his master at Graz. Not only was the Major absent-minded, but his morning rides were so protracted that Anna Krone did not know how to keep the food from burning. Almost every day he went to the post himself either to deliver a letter or pick up the reply if there was one. It was useless for Joseph to rummage through the waste-paper basket. After being read and answered these letters were not torn up, but put by, apparently envelope and all, out of everybody's reach.

Anna Krone too would have liked to get to the bottom of it. While condemning Joseph's indiscretions, she was glad to learn the results of his investigations—very negative results unfortunately. In the end she could hold out no longer. Without letting anybody know she paid a visit to the ailing wife of the postmaster of Seekirchen. The postmaster had a conscience: he deemed it a grave offence to reveal the address of a letter that had been personally entrusted to him. He wrapped himself in an impenetrable cloud of mystery when Anna, with a woman's lack of moral sense in matters of professional rectitude, proceeded to pump him. But as she had at the same time brought some apples and a flask of wine for his wife, it was more than he could do not to allow a tiny ray of light to break through the clouds of official secrecy. It was no more than the faintest wink, which however made the position as clear to Anna Krone as a complete betrayal. She hastened away, and from that day her interest in Joseph's investigations became somewhat perfunctory.

"But do you know something more?" asked Joseph, looking suspiciously into her innocent face.

The Major tried to look equally innocent when Father Aigner came to read mass the second Sunday in January. Upon being told that he seemed to be in much better spirits than the last time, and that

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apparently his little trip to Graz had done him good, Georg nodded, saying casually that he might be going again for a few days the following week. Repressing a movement of surprise, the priest confined himself to saying that he now had no alternative but to withdraw the well-meant advice he had given him on a previous occasion. "Well, well," he added, "you seem to be having a good time with your friends there, but I am not surprised. It is not the first time I have heard that Graz is a merry town."

Returning once more from the merry town of Graz after three days' absence, Georg was not only remarkably less restless, but there seemed to be something triumphant about his general demeanour. He continued to write every day, but now Joseph was allowed to take the letters to the post, and one of these letters was addressed to Maria von Lerchenfeld, Graz.

Joseph kept his discovery to himself, not only because he did not see why Anna Krone should know, but more especially because in the last few days he had got back respect and esteem for his master. The fact was that he had at last been successful in bringing Trudi back to the castle. He smuggled her back during Georg's absence, confident that upon his return his master would have other matters in his head and would not trouble to enquire who was actually dusting his rooms. There he was wrong. Georg summoned him and questioned him on the matter. In his nervousness Joseph faltered and prevaricated until the Major interrupted him and said, "Stop telling lies, man! I gather from one thing and another that she likes to work here, and that it suits your purpose too. I give you both one more chance; the very first time anything happens that does not please me, out she goes and so do you. Do we understand one another?"

Joseph made a grateful bow. His heart was beating for joy as he listened to this sharp allocution, softened as it was by the favour bestowed upon him. He told Trudi nothing of the threat, and amplified the favour. Her respect for him returned, and so everything was as it had been in the days when they first got to know and care for one another. Once again she could be proud of her Joseph in the eyes of the other girls, of her Joseph who knew how to get his way with the Baron when he had a mind to it, and in order not to be less than Hannerl, not only in the eyes of her master, but in those of her promised bridegroom, she set to work with a will.

Georg von Weygand was unable to wait for Father Aigner's next visit: the very next Sunday afternoon he rode to the house of the young priest, and while the host, greatly honoured, was choosing a cigar for him, the Major stretched out his long legs, and, flicking his whip against his riding boots took a deep breath and confessed that he was thinking of getting married in February. It was just the kind

of news the other had been expecting from the moment the Major turned up. He contrived nevertheless to evince surprise, and even incredulity, so that Georg was constrained once again to confirm the wonderful tidings.

"You're in earnest then! And to think of what you told me only a few weeks ago! You were only trying to lead me up the garden path. Well, you were successful!"

"She's a lady from Graz," added Georg in an embarrassed tone.

"From Graz! That was why you were saying only the other day . . .!"

Georg delicately glided over that. "I met her at my friend's house. She's thirty and I'm nearly fifty. There's no reason therefore for delaying the marriage. It's to take place in Graz: her old mother is still alive, and it would be difficult for her to make the journey here in February. Now I want to ask you something, not in your capacity of ecclesiastic, but simply as a friend. When we arrive together at Maria-Licht, would you be willing to welcome her with a few words? You understand what I mean; it would make everything less matter-of-fact. I should have liked her to come and look at the place beforehand, to make sure that she would not find things too uncomfortable. But she refuses to leave her mother even for a day before her marriage, and would rather let it all be a surprise to her. That's why I've twice been to Klagenfurt to put a few finishing touches to the house now that a lady is to live in it once more. As it is, there are sufficient drawbacks from her point of view, what with having to live half on a farm, and what with having only an old foggy like myself to talk to." This was said with a smile, partly to conceal his very real diffidence, and partly to let it be understood that he was only making a little joke. And Father Aigner laughed also, to show that he was pretty confident that she would be more than satisfied with the conversation of the old foggy whom she had chosen as a husband; and naturally he would be present at the castle to utter a few well-chosen words of welcome to the bride and bridegroom. He was greatly honoured.

If that was the case, said Georg, he would have to prove it by coming to see them often during the first months. He would send Krone with the carriage. Just a word to say he was coming would be sufficient. He went on to say, in a somewhat gruff, embarrassed tone, that the lady in question had suffered a bereavement ten years ago. Her fiancé, a doctor of archæology, was taken ill while touring Greece with his students, and died, apparently from drinking contaminated water. There had been cases of typhoid also among the students he was conducting . . . Georg deliberately elaborated on this theme, because he felt that the death of this young doctor upon a journey pursued for high cultural ends invested his future bride with a sort of halo of nobility. She was a member of the lower aristocracy, with Hungarian

blood in her veins on her mother's side, and after her tragic loss she became the old lady's devoted nurse. His future mother-in-law would now go and live with another married daughter. During the coming summer she would perhaps honour her son-in-law by spending a month or so at Maria-Licht.

Father Aigner said he now had all the necessary data for his speech of welcome. Relieved, Georg got up from his chair.

"Meanwhile may I congratulate you, my dear bridegroom," said the priest with a roguish smile. The Lord of the Manor put out his hand, grateful but a bit confused. He jumped into his saddle and with an airy wave of his riding crop rode out into the fields.

About the middle of February Georg von Weygand departed for the third time for Graz, after having curtly informed Joseph and Eisengruber that he would come back in four days' time a married man in the company of his wife. This announcement was not strictly necessary, for his attendants had been prepared for something of this kind ever since a consignment of new furniture, including a lady's dressing-table, had arrived at Klagenfurt. But there was something more behind Georg's astonishing communicativeness. Perhaps one of the two men would have the sense to understand what he was expecting of them without his having to say so in so many words; if possible he wanted something to be done to provide his wife with a hearty welcome upon her arrival. Naturally he could have instructed them to line themselves up as a guard of honour; but it was painful to have to enforce such a demonstration of devotion. Having got this embarrassing subject out of the way, he severely admonished Joseph to see to it that all the rooms were in good order. He did not want the Baroness to have to make remarks the very moment of her arrival.

Joseph gave the Herr Baron every assurance. He would have liked to have added that he and Trudi would be ready to receive them, but he decided that this was not the moment when his master would be likely to set much store by such intimations of personal loyalty.

The bridal pair were to arrive at Seekirchen on Saturday afternoon. Krone was to wait for them with the carriage. The major had told him to harness the two Oldenburgs. Father Aigner had arranged for the burgomaster to be at the station with chain of office and top-hat, accompanied by his aldermen. His little daughter was to present a bouquet. The band of the veterans' society "Saint Cecilia" were going to line up outside to play the Bridal March from *Lohengrin*. This difficult piece was now being practised with feverish haste. The voluntary fire brigade were also to be present complete with banner, but this was not all Father Aigner envisaged. Through rain and wind he trudged to Maria Licht in order to arrange for the decorations of the castle. Obviously the flag would have to be put out from the tower. The gate, the little drive, the library and the dining-hall were

to be brightened up with green foliage. It would be dark by the time the bridal pair arrived; therefore torches would burn and somebody would ring the bell as soon as the carriage came in sight. And then of course, every one would have to be present in his Sunday best in the inner court. Perhaps an appropriate song might be found for welcoming the Baron and the Baroness.

Apart from the appropriate song, everything went off according to plan. The popular songs that are usually heard at peasant weddings would hardly do for the Baroness, and Chaplain Aigner might not care to listen to them either. However, they could always break out in loud huzzas and shout "Long live the Baron and the Baroness." Surely that would do just as well to show their good intentions. Krone insisted on driving the priest home. When he had gone, they all began to discuss what else could be done to enliven the occasion. Joseph thought it would be nice to have a cardboard shield with the word "Welcome" in a frame of holly. Anna Krone became so excited that she forgot her feud with Trudi and debated with her how the dinner-table could be given a really festive appearance. Meanwhile Krone retired into the coach-house to make up his mind whether the old family coach could still be used. There was a good chance of snow, and in all probability the old contraption would be unable to get through it. So to be on the safe side he polished up the sleigh, and its harness with the tinkling bells. They all worked at the decorations with a zest that was the result of a mixture of things: there was joy in the work, good-will towards the Major and also much satisfaction because he was getting married at last. Ever since the drama with Hannerl every one had noticed that even he was only human. And they were all agog to know what the Lady of the Castle would be like.

On the Saturday itself a heavy snowstorm was whirling over Seekirchen and over the woods round Maria-Licht. At three in the afternoon the lamps had to be lit. The station-master who was also the leader of the voluntary fire-brigade said that the five-thirty train would never be in on time. He was indeed right. At six there was no sign of the train, and at seven news arrived from Unterdrauburg that even there the train had not yet arrived. At eight Matthias Eckbauer, the burgomaster of Seekirchen, realized that he would do well to send his little daughter to bed. Both the time and the weather militated against floral tributes. His wife went away with the child, but he stuck to his post. At least, up to a point. He ceased pacing up and down the platform with his eyes screwed against the driving snow, and went across the road to fraternize with his fellow-villagers who had already sought warmth and comfort in the inn Zum goldenen Rehbock. They were killing the time with beer and with wine, with sauerkraut and

hot sausage, and by ten o'clock hardly any one gave a thought to the train. Outside, the snow went on uninterruptedly, but inside the heat and the smoke rose to the windows. It was a good evening for the innkeeper. His wife was helping behind the counter, and the two daughters served the customers. They were comely lasses who hurried with floating skirts between the tables and did not mind particularly if occasionally a hand was laid on their hips in a rather familiar way. They knew all these men by name and surname; but if any one tried to go too far he was rewarded with a resounding slap which aroused scornful laughter among the other guests. At eleven it was decided to serenade Anne-Marie, the daughter who was going to get married a few weeks later. Under the low ceiling the sounds grew mixed and muddled, but no one cared. They sang and rocked their bodies to the measure of the well-known melodies, arm in arm. Krone had stabled his horses behind the inn and he was seated in front of a glass of wine. His face was red, and as the music stormed his ears he thought the world incredibly lovely. Anna seemed to be young once more and as desirable as when he kissed her for the first time. The burgomaster also came under the influence of the music. Lisl, the innkeeper's younger daughter, was now seated by him and he held her round plump hand paternally inside his big hairy fist. Between two of his fingers there was room for a cigar as well. With the other hand, dressed in a kid glove, he raised his glass of beer and invited Lisl with a wink to share it. She did, but at the same time she stifled a yawn that brought tears into her eyes.

"I still remember when you were a child and went to school with two plaits hanging down your back" whispered Eckbauer.

She turned an astonished face towards the man by her side, with the silver chain of office round his thick-set red neck. "Well, well, so that's the kind of man you are!"

The band began playing a dance tune. And just then the station-master rushed in with the news that the snow-plough had just passed, so that the train could not be far behind. He found it impossible to make himself heard above the shouts and the songs. The smoke was making him almost invisible to all those who were not close to the door; so he drew his whistle and blew it as loudly as he could. At the shrill and almost ominous sound no further words were needed. They all jumped up, every one seized his instrument or his banner, and rushed outside. Even Krone suddenly felt wide awake. He remembered clearly where he had left his horses, but he found it difficult to elbow his way in the direction opposite to the general movement, for he had to be at the back of the inn. And just as the path seemed to be clear it turned out to be treacherously strewn with tables and chairs that had been knocked over. The burgomaster Eckbauer was the last to leave. In the general confusion he had been kissing Lisl, the inn-

keeper's younger daughter's hand. But now duty commanded that he should remember his exalted position, and so, slowly and in a melancholy manner, tugging hard to get his second kid glove over his big knuckles, he cast a final glance full of meaning at Lisl. Then with great dignity he placed himself at the head of the band which had already lined up.

The cold sobered them all down, and the speech of welcome Eckbauer had learned by heart somehow came back to his memory as the train slowly steamed in. He beckoned to the aldermen and with steady steps marched towards the tall strong man who at the end of the train was helping a lady to get down. All of a sudden he felt that it would not do in these circumstances to utter painfully memorized official words, and so he presented his formidable fist, and in very ordinary words revealed what had been meant to be kept a secret until the very last moment. "Half Seekirchen is waiting outside" he said, and then, rather shyly, he turned to the slight figure in dark clothes which appeared in the shadow of the Baron. A somewhat pale lady with a very delicate face gave him a most friendly smile.

He muttered a vague welcome and kissed her hand just as he had done to Lisl a few moments before. Then he remembered that he ought to introduce his aldermen and the station-master. She remarked at once that it was so kind of all of them to have waited all these long hours for her husband and herself. Touched by the fact that so great a lady took notice of what they had done for her, the burgomaster hastened to assure her that it had been a great pleasure for all of them to be kept waiting. And in order at once to impress her with his authority, he pushed back with a majestic gesture the benumbed and sleepy commercial traveller who was the only other passenger for Seekirchen, and who had the temerity to try and slip through the exit in front of them.

Outside, the musicians broke into the festive march. Dumbfounded, the little commercial traveller peered out of his turned-up collar. With his bride on his arm Georg waited underneath the awning for the blaring march to end. The falling snow made the music sound almost soft and harmonious. Only the cornet player was not quite right. But as the burgomaster whispered into the Major's ear this man was merely a substitute from another village. Georg nodded and stepped towards the bandmaster in order to congratulate him. Thereupon all the dignitaries expressed their congratulations and he introduced his wife and thanked them all. He said they would never forget this reception.

Krone now appeared with the sledge through the double gate of the inn. His driving was a little unsteady and one of the runners almost passed over the bride's foot. Georg quickly drew her aside and with

his boot he pushed the sleigh in another direction. She did not even notice what had happened and exclaimed with pleasure at the sight of the sleigh and the horses that had been decked out so bravely.

While Krone came down from the box and bent forward in order to unfold the rugs in the sleigh, Georg noticed that like all those who had welcomed him he was smelling of drink. He pushed him aside and helped his wife to enter. From right and left men ran forward to help wrap her up; she bowed her thanks in every direction, and they were all caught by the charm of her sweet and somewhat shy smile. Georg found it difficult to hide his pride, even though the spectators of this great moment were only peasant louts. He sat down by her side and to the tune of "While the swallows fly home" the sledge glided off into the darkness. When it became probable that the bridal pair were out of hearing the music broke off in the middle of a bar, and the musicians trooped back into the inn to fortify themselves before returning to their homes. From their comments it was apparent that everybody had lost his heart to the Baron's lady. The burgomaster was now less sensitive to Lisl's charms, and this just when she herself had made up her mind, during his absence, that she cared for him a little all the same. He had rather impressed her by the distinguished manner in which before taking his place in front of the orchestra he pulled on his second kid glove. But now, she supposed with a sigh, he must have remembered that he was a married man and a burgomaster, seated in the midst of his aldermen and of his fellow villagers.

To the muffled tinkling of the bells and the soft thudding of the horses' hooves on the unresisting surface, the sleigh glided through the night. Maria placed her head on her husband's shoulder and with his hand he protected her face against the driving snow. But meanwhile he kept a watchful eye on Krone. At the first clumsy motion he was firmly determined to seize him by the collar and throw him out, and to take the reins himself. It was as though Krone felt the danger. His driving was faultless. Gradually Georg felt more gently towards the driver: after all, the ornaments on the sleigh and on the harness told of so much devotion.

He bent over his bride and asked her whether she was cold, whether she was tired and also whether she had minded the music very much. After all, he pleaded, she ought to realize the good intentions of these people. He also warned her that of course no one would be up at this late hour to welcome her to the Castle. No one there could have the faintest notion of the time of their arrival. She merely smiled; in the faint light of the two snow-clad lamps he saw her grey eyes looking at him.

"I could not have wished a single thing to have been different"

she said. "It could not have been lovelier." Do you hear these bells in the silence? I shall be so sorry when it's over."

"About another quarter of an hour and we'll be there" said Georg, and then he found no further words. He was holding her wrist and meanwhile protecting her veiled face. From time to time he had to shake the snow off his glove, and her hat was half-hidden under the snow. She sat there so quietly by his side that he might have thought she was overcome with fatigue and had fallen asleep. He whispered her name and she answered with a gentle pressure of her hand.

Yes he was happy, he too could not have wished things to have been different. The unexpected delay of the train in a deserted field, the chilly threat of the snowstorm, then the appearance of the snow-plough . . . it had all been just as he had reassuringly foretold. And then the arrival at the village station, with the deputation and the band, against the background of the lighted windows of the inn. Yes, he would show the ex-soldiers' union and the band that they had done well to choose him for their patron. And if the castle was in darkness and nobody was up, it did not matter. He was sure at any rate that as long as the sleigh had not arrived Anna Krone would not dream of going to bed.

When at last they drew near Maria-Licht Krone unexpectedly lifted up his whip and pointed at the bonfire in the distance. Georg went warm all over and Maria peered out from between the rugs and looked with large eyes at the ruddy glow. Then suddenly between the tinkling of the sleigh bells, they clearly perceived the ringing of the bell in the castle tower. Krone flicked his whip through the snow flakes and the horses pricked up their ears and redoubled their pace. There, illuminated by two bright fires, appeared the ornamental entrance. There was a large board with the word "Welcome." The mere word conveyed an atmosphere that was bound to affect Maria. The snow added the final touch of glamour to the scene. The drive was lit up with torches, there were voices and shouts as the sleigh appeared, and the whole staff in their Sunday best shouted, "Long live the Baron and the Baroness!" Their eyes shone with joy. At the foot of the stairway stood Father Aigner. For the first time Georg saw how pleasant his young face looked.


Slowly Maria rose from the sleigh. She looked round as in a dream. She allowed someone to press a bouquet into her hands and her eyes filled with tears. Georg had to straighten himself up to control his emotion. He noticed that Anna Krone and the farmer's wife were crying. He smiled and nodded to them.

He did not clearly understand the words of Father Aigner but he noticed that they were all listening with emotion; so he lifted his head still higher in the cold snow that seemed to mingle with the vague sound of the bell in the tower. When the priest had finished he

shook hands with him warmly and assisted his wife, smiling and weeping at the same time, to climb up the steps.

In the dining-hall Anna Krone had her surprise ready. Maria must be hungry after the long journey. The table, the chandeliers, and the whole room were green with pine branches. There was a smell of resin and candles and cooked meats. Large logs were burning in the hearth. It was half-past two now, but no one thought of going to bed. The staff had spent the long hours of waiting in Anna's kitchen where she held a reception with coffee and *apfel-strudel*. Father Aigner was with them and was entertaining them with amusing details from the life of St. Augustin, who had not hesitated to confess all the sins of his youth in a book he wrote when he had seen the light. And Father Aigner added that certainly he would never become a Saint himself, but all the same he was willing to confess that as a youngster he had only too often annoyed his mother by his pranks. Meanwhile, they had taken it in turns to go up the tower in order to look out for the arrival of the sleigh. This was how the bonfires had been lit at the precise time, while Anna Krone was able to serve the soup piping hot.

And now, as she was giving the last touch to the venison, she was still crying because the Baroness was so young, so friendly and so lovely that one could notice it even underneath her veil, and Anna was also crying because she had to arrive in the middle of night and with such weather. But poor Anna also cried because while Krone removed his greatcoat still covered with snow and leant against the chimney wrenching off his boots, he was reeking of drink.



CHAPTER FOUR

CHRISTMAS

MARIA's forehead was small and quiet like that of a nun, and she had also the religious temperament of a nun. Her eyes were of an unusual blue-grey; even when she smiled they kept something melancholy. Her narrow mouth never entirely lost the mark of what she had once suffered. Her abundant ash-coloured hair refused to stay tidy; very often it dropped out of position and then, with a quick gesture of the hand, she had to put it in order. This gesture had become typical of her; it had something that was almost furtive and guilty. Trudi soon acquired the habit of gathering into a little heap the hairpins she found strewn about, and Maria put them back with a sigh where they belonged. But the kind of hairpins that could have kept this silly flowing mane in place had not yet been invented.

She was thirty and had experienced the full weight of life. Yet she had kept something childlike, and perhaps this was the reason that made people feel so strangely moved when they met her. The day after her arrival she asked to be shown over the castle she was going to inhabit. Her large eyes that took in everything very quietly were ready to admire all she saw. The Major led her to the window of the bedroom that had been newly furnished for her and pointed at the moat and at the snow-covered pine-woods on which the sun was shining. Obediently she drew a deep breath in order to take in the healthy strengthening air as he had told her.

She climbed the tower after him, and then she was able to see the frozen lake that lay darkling in the midst of a vast white world, cut off towards the south by an out-runner of the Karawanken mountains. Then she followed him to the top floor that had been kept closed for more than a year because it was not used anyhow and could not be kept clean. She agreed at once that these rooms were not needed and would be better kept locked. She walked towards the portrait of Georg's first wife Elisabeth, looked at it, and said softly: "She must have been very lovely." He found it impossible to reply, but took her arm and led her towards the photograph over his writing desk where he was shown in the midst of his soldiers.

He took her to see his horses, the two Trakehners from Vienna. With beating heart Krone was standing to attention, as always when speaking to his master. Georg said that the mare Sultane was intended for her. If she was not too tired they might presently go out for an hour, so that he could show her the property. Would she care to try

his aunt's saddle? She said that she had taken no exercise for years, but why should they not go? She was not in the least tired. He was pleased, and failed to heart the slight note of fatigue in her voice. Krone hastened to saddle the two horses.

On the farm Maria soon made friends with Magdalena Eisengruber. She also obediently admired the milch cows which her husband himself showed her, but when he tried to explain the advantages of the new stone floor in the stables and the improved system of draining, her thoughts wandered away. She noticed the little son of the farmer, patted him on the head and asked his name. The little chap was very shy. "Can't you open your mouth?" said his father. The boy blushed and said his name was Toni. "I was six yesterday," he suddenly added. "Then you're entitled to a present," said Maria. The Major thought it better not to proceed with his technical demonstrations.

Maria did not prove a very good horsewoman, but she succeeded in keeping in the saddle, and when her husband suggested that they might go more slowly she shook her head. She told him how amazed she was at the size of the woods and the fields around. He had not mentioned that so much land went with the farm. He lived like a sovereign here. While he stopped to give a few instructions to the woodcutters, she stood at a discreet distance, and as one of the men looked round a little uncertainly at her, she hastened to smile at him with that shy friendliness that had such a confusing effect on people. The previous Baroness was very different indeed.

Yes, she was doing her best. She was doing her best to gain the affection of everybody who had to serve Georg or herself. She was doing her best not to disappoint her husband. Evidently he expected his wife to give him much of her company; he must have been very lonely before she arrived.

She was full of good intentions. She wanted to run the household as cheaply as possible: when he proposed to her he said that he was not very well off. But she wanted to organize these economies so that they hurt or harmed no one. Again and again, when she discussed domestic purchases and meals with Anna Krone, she repeated that Anna knew so much better what the Baron liked. She seemed to apologize for interfering with these concerns. Anna Krone did not quite know how to take it. Naturally she had expected to hand over the management. In consequence these discussions about the daily menu took place in an atmosphere of constraint. At last Anna, who was older, took a bold initiative: she simply resumed entire management. Before speaking to her mistress she had everything cut-and-dried, and the Baroness always agreed and praised Anna's excellent decisions.

There were a few dishes, like paprika chicken, which Maria enjoyed preparing herself. She would appear in the kitchen, put on one of Anna's clean overalls and prepare the Hungarian dish with which

she welcomed the Baron the first time he visited her mother's house. Anna let her have her own way, with an occasional expression of approval or even admiration, but as soon as her mistress's back was turned she added whatever she thought necessary to improve the dish.

Things were running so smoothly at the castle that after a week Maria confessed to her husband that her presence was entirely superfluous. Every one did his duty and it would have been impossible to spend the household money more wisely than did Anna Krone. He took her in his arms and told her never to say this again: she was the only reason for which all these things existed.

On his side Georg lived in constant fear that the monotony of country life might end by depressing her. He had resumed the habit of riding out alone in the morning because one day Maria was so tired when they came back that she fainted. On one of these rides he called on Father Aigner to persuade him to look in soon and to discuss with his wife some of those subjects, like music and literature, of which he could not talk to her himself.

The chaplain advised him to go for sleigh drives in the neighbourhood, since riding tired her too much. The fresh air would do her good. And when he told Maria she showed herself delighted. Georg reproached himself for not having thought of this himself. He ordered Krone at once to harness the horses to the sleigh. He took her to the spot where the deer, driven from the woods by hunger, boldly picked up the food that was put down for them. She was delighted, and said she would like to return every day as long as the animals remained so tame. The deer seemed to be less nervous of her than of Franzl. Georg also took her for a drive across the lake. During this bitter winter of 1890-91 it was frozen up for many months. The horses were able to step across the hard slippery ice, and the sleigh kept very steady. To glide mysteriously over these unplumbed depths was like driving in a dream. Behind them the wooded hills sank away like the dark limits of a world to which they had bidden good-bye. Once or twice a lonely skater passed by like a ghost. Maria sat with half-closed eyes by her husband's side. The hollow sound of the hooves upon the snow-covered ice, the snoring breath of the horses, the tinkling of the bells, the crackling hiss of fragments of ice detached by the horses' shoes, and the crunching of these fragments by the sleigh all seemed to come from far away. It was the earthly projection of their soundless journey through happiness. One longing remained only, but this she did not mention. And yet her silence confirmed Georg's belief that her thoughts were far from him, far away in regions that could only be mentioned in talks with Father Aigner, and where he could not follow her.

All her childlike qualities notwithstanding, she remained full of

mystery for him. Her whole being seemed deep and unfathomable. There were days when he failed to understand how he had ever dared propose to her. He was convinced that she had done him an immense favour by accepting him, and the idea that she might have been prompted by feelings warmer than mere kindness did not even present itself to his mind. Full of a confidence that seemed altogether unjustified in his own eyes, she had surrendered to him on that wonderful night of their arrival, and it seemed to be her ambition to grant him whatever could make her husband happy. But he still hesitated to accept a gift that filled him with confusion. Her passion revealed itself more intense every night in the quiet seclusion of their bedroom, and appeared to him incompatible with her serene, child-like smile. It was as though she merely humiliated herself for his sake, and this he would not have. She must remain the fairy-tale princess he had carried in his sleigh to the castle, there to be enthroned. And now she had discovered his lowly sensual nature!

How much simpler it had all been in the case of Hannerl! But it was profanation to compare that unbridled crisis of the senses with the feelings he had for his wife. The mere thought that Maria might ever get to know the story was horrifying. He had intended at first to confess it to her, but he realized by now that he would never have the courage to do so. No doubt she would have forgiven him, but even one initial moment of loathing on her part would have been unbearable.

However busy he might be, Father Aigner found it possible to make himself free of a morning or an afternoon to look in at Maria-Licht. Obediently he would converse with the lady of the castle upon the topics prescribed by the Major. But sometimes, because she showed such a genuine interest, he talked about his own life, about the vocation he had felt from early childhood, and about religion in general. Very gradually he got her to talk about herself as well. She told him what she had passed through ten years before at the death of her fiancé. The convent had then appeared the only possible escape, and she might indeed have gone that way if her father had not died unexpectedly. Then she had to look after her mother who could not venture a step by herself.

Years later, when everything within her seemed to have gone chilly and rigid, Georg von Weygand appeared before her, a tall, kind-hearted and lonely widower, an earnest and slightly old-fashioned man who deserved better than to be repelled. He ignored the blow fate had delivered to him, and talked to her as though their life was only just beginning. At first she found it impossible to believe him, but she had listened, deeply moved. Mama at once said that she must on no account refuse him. She would go and live with Ilonka, whose husband had just been transferred to Graz. Poor dear Mama must have realized from the first that she could not have rejected

Georg's proposal, that she must follow him whether she wished it or not, and that life itself was beckoning. Yes, life was in a way beginning all afresh. For her husband's sake she would have liked to be stronger. No wonder that he sometimes looked upon her as though she were a child. But she was a little too old merely to be his child. She did not want to disappoint him in one great desire at any rate, which she knew most positively that he felt. No doubt he did not expect it from her, but his surprise would be all the greater if one day she could tell him that . . . How would he take it? Would he at last look upon her as his wife? Oh, it would be for her the great wonder of which she did not dare to dream. At first she hesitated, uncertain whether she had the courage. But now she was firmly decided.

She blushed as she made this admission to the priest and her eyes betrayed an excitement almost too great for her. She confessed that this was also why she preferred not to go riding. It was lucky that she had fainted that time. Father Aigner looked at her reflectingly for a long time, then he awoke from his meditation. "God is on your side," he murmured.

When she was alone Maria repeated these words: "God is on my side!" When she was sure that all the servants were down in the kitchen she went to the chapel where there was a rustic image of Our Lady. She was sure the image had more than once received prayers for divine assistance, and had answered them. It was quiet in the chapel. No one saw her light the candle. The little flame lived and whispered in her hand, and the Virgin Mother who knew everything smiled encouragingly at her. Oh, it was good being here! She could stay for a quarter of an hour; Georg would not arrive home before.

From Graz a few more trunks with clothes and books were delivered and also, after a fair amount of correspondence, a grand piano. Transport along the snow-covered road in the wood proved difficult. But at last the instrument was duly put up in the music-room and the same day a tuner appeared from Klagenfurt in answer to the Major's request. At first Maria felt rather nervous lest any one should hear her play, but after a few days she let herself go. In the evening Georg sat looking at his book, but after she uncovered the keyboard and began to play very softly, he did not get the meaning of a single sentence.

He could not help telling her how much he admired her playing. Formerly, she replied, she was able to play a little, though she often made her music master sigh. Now she had not touched the keys for years, and she had forgotten all she ever knew. "Then you'll have to take lessons once more," said Georg, and with the energy that more and more characterized him he acted at once. Soon a young man presented himself, with his newly acquired diploma in his pocket, and

proud of the high marks he had obtained at the conservatory. During the very first lesson he told his new pupil that he hoped to become a great composer. It must have been the great awe inspired by Georg that reminded him of the real purpose of each visit, for Maria gave him little encouragement. She thought he was at his best when he talked about his own compositions and played from them. It was only after he went that the exercises he told her to practise interested her, and she studied diligently in order to give him satisfaction and especially to please her husband. On returning from his morning ride, Georg heard her play before he passed the gate, and it seemed to him that her music gave new life to the castle.

In the evening she sang for him when she felt in the mood. She sang Schubert and Cornelius and gipsy songs from Hungary, although she had never been there herself. Staring at the tip of his boot the Major listened to these melancholy tunes and the dreams he had begun to weave when he met her at the house of his old comrade Otto von Sterneck and had exchanged the first words with her went on.

Magdalena Eisengruber begged her to play the little organ in the chapel in her place. Georg von Weygand would have been delighted if the chaplain could have celebrated Mass in the chapel every Sunday. For he was proud of his wife's musical achievements, and of the fact that the first time she played she got notes out of the little organ which no one would have suspected were there. Maria herself had felt reluctant to make this new public appearance; she gave way, not in order to take the burden off Magdalena Eisengruber, but in order to please her husband. Her hands were too small to span the keys, and at each note which slipped from her hold she felt a growing discomfort. In the midst of her confusion she also realized that her hair was getting out of position.

On the Saturday before Easter Georg drove with his wife to Seekirchen. They followed the procession behind the life-size image of the crucified Saviour. Maria had never taken part in such a rural procession before, and she felt too moved to join in the *kyrie* which the women sang together. Towards the end of the procession snow began to fall from the darkened sky. The Major and Eisengruber and all the farmers, perhaps even the old parish priest who was carrying the sacrament, were thinking of this winter without end, and wondering what would happen if it lasted much longer. Would the cattle ever get fresh food again? The women were pulling their top skirt over their heads, and covered their burning candles against the snowflakes. The painfully realistic, scarlet wounds of the waxen Christ filled with white snow. The *Miserere* that was now being sung was smothered in white dampness, like the peal of the distant church bell that was raising its voice once more now that it had come back from its mystical flight to Rome.

Maria's mind preserved the impression of this wonderful, solemn, procession for a long time. She grew silent and absent-minded. Although recently she had studied with almost excessive zeal, she now gave up playing altogether. Whenever her husband anxiously questioned her she swore with tears in her eyes that she was unutterably happy by his side, and that she was not longing for Graz or for any other place. It was as though she were waiting for something, and though he began vaguely to suspect what she was waiting for, he told himself he did not understand her at all. He remembered a similar nervousness in Elizabeth during the early years of their married life. In her case it had been a chronic depression which suddenly turned into an uncontrollable hunger for pleasure and oblivion, to which she had sacrificed their married happiness. Was he going to live through the same thing once more? He would be unable to bear it a second time.

Then there came a change. It was not at all what he had feared in a moment of unjustified depression. On the evening of the first real spring day, she whispered to him news that made him turn paler than the white-washed wall against which he was standing. He thought he must have misunderstood, but she repeated the news with tears and laughter, and then he also felt the tears rolling down his cheeks. There had been a time when he thought that life was as good as over for him. Since then life had given him one surprise after the other.

He did not sleep a wink the whole night; how could he have slept? He listened to the breathing of his wife. He felt that night as though he were watching over her and over the child she was going to give him. Of a sudden, life had grown immense and wide. Through his child it would stretch into an endless vista. He was no longer a man doomed to disappear, kept standing only by his strong constitution. A new life was gathering strength, and he was like a tree that spread out its protecting branches. "God, I thank you for this. But it is too much, too overwhelming! I cannot yet believe it. I must see and hear all this first in the full daylight."

He dared hardly move lest he might disturb Maria. She also was awake, but she kept her eyes shut, because she did not want to rob him of the satisfaction of this vigil. When the first light of the morning shimmered through the curtains she took refuge in his arms and whispered. "How lovely everything is going to be, now!" He looked anxiously into her eyes, and in a voice trembling with nocturnal doubts, he said, "But are you really quite certain?"—"Of course I am certain," she replied.

There was in her look a light of naughty triumph, it was almost as though she were making merry at his expense. Suddenly he felt that he understood her better than he had done in all these months since

she had become his wife. More passionately than he had ever dared he drew her towards him.

Kalmuk whom he mounted after breakfast was the first to share the great secret. "Better be ready, old boy!" He took the direction of Seekirchen where he caught the young priest just as he was going out. "One moment, Father Aigner!" With the surprised ecclesiastic he entered the room. As he stood before him it was all he could do not to allow any weakness to reveal itself in his voice. "Father Aigner, my wife asks whether in due course you will come to Maria-Licht to baptize my son." The younger man looked at him with big eyes. The nobleman might be able to control himself, but the young priest was unable to follow his example. His strong hands shook the visitor's shoulder. "Congratulations!" he exclaimed, this is indeed God's own work."

Georg did not mind, because now the great news stood out in its full significance: he had told someone and been congratulated. It had become tangible.

"Well, that's all. Don't let me keep you," he said with a laugh as he mounted his horse. The priest had only just returned to a sense of realities. He placed his hand on the saddle and somewhat uncertainly asked: "But what did you say . . . a son?"

"A son, what else should it be?" was Georg's self-assured reply. His tone even betrayed a slight irritation, but he controlled himself, because the priest meant no harm. But he made it quite clear that there was to be no further discussion by riding away with a familiar salute with his riding crop. A son! What else could it be? He did not even want to think about it. To doubt seemed cowardly and even dangerous.

Around him Nature seemed rejuvenated. Oh, to be able to show the property for the first time to his son, to show these fields that would continue to bear fruit after his death for his son, and for his son's sons. He pictured himself riding here with him by his side. The son must have a horse of his own. What a good thing it would be if Sultane foaled this year. Georg did not yet realize that these dreams would take time to materialize. He even wanted to go to Franzl to choose a playmate for his son among Franzl's litter of puppies.

If this was God's work, God would not deny him a son, Georg told himself with a laugh. God's work . . . but if he had not been what he was, there would have been no son. He was fifty now. What are fifty years? Just enough to get a little knowledge of life, and to learn to accept a son as a present from Heaven. He had no intention to step out of this world before he had made a man of him.

Then, as he thought of Maria, all his self-assurance left him. She would have to keep very quiet. She must not overrate her strength. They would have to consult a doctor at an early stage. How wise she

had been not to go out riding. What had he been thinking of? Fifty, and what a fool he still was! God in Heaven, what might have happened! Even now so many things might happen yet! It was as though black night drew in around him. He gave the spurs to Kalmuk and galloped back to the castle. Krone was startled when he saw the sweating horse, trembling on its legs with exhaustion.

This was Georg's only great fear. It gave him sleepless nights and in the day-time it made him seem queer. Formerly Krone knew within a quarter of an hour when his master was returning. He used to drink a final cup of coffee in his wife's kitchen, and, wiping the brown stain from his moustache, he would say: "Well, I'm off to the stables." But nowadays?

The fear would get hold of Georg in the midst of his work. He had left Maria an hour before, certain that she was well and in good spirits. But while he was walking through the stables or across the land with Eisengruber, discussing all that had to be settled before his son came into the world, he was seized all at once by this unreasonable, paralysing fear. He forgot what he was discussing. The things that had claimed his interest a moment ago disappeared into the mist that rose before his eyes. With a vague and improbable explanation for his sudden departure he went off.

Maria tried to reassure him. She did not feel too weak to give him the child she was carrying. She would come through it. Who else could look after the little one? This topsy-turvy argument carried conviction for a while: it sounded so plausible. She, whom he had once looked upon as a child that had to be protected from life, laughed at the things that frightened him. At present she refused to have anything to do with a doctor. Was she not feeling perfectly fit? In June or July her mother would come over. She was as good as a doctor. No, she was better.

In her heart of hearts, Maria was pleased with Georg's ridiculous fears, though she laughed at him. When she was alone with Father Aigner she told him of her husband's exaggerated worries. "Yes, and then to think that in all probability he's not even thinking of me in the first place, but wondering whether he'll be given what he has been promised! It's only now that I am seeing him as he really is." But as she spoke her eyes sparkled with merry irony. Father Aigner agreed that, though twenty years older than himself, the Baron was a big child. He was thinking in particular, he said, of the unshakable conviction with which he had insisted that his first-born would be a boy. Thereupon Maria looked at her visitor with slight astonishment and told him with the guileless smile of a saint that of course it was going to be a son and nothing else.

"But, pardon me, how do you know?"

"I've prayed for it."

"Yes, but . . ."

Maria's questioning look reduced him to silence. It was difficult for Father Aigner to continue the argument without laying himself open to the suspicion that he had less faith than his parishioner. He contented himself with a sigh, but even this sigh was proof of a reprehensible lack of confidence in divine grace and providence.

In July old Frau von Lerchenfeld carried out her promise to visit her daughter at Maria-Licht. Half an hour before the arrival of the train her son-in-law was pacing up and down the platform. Together with Brigitte, the maid from Graz, he helped her into his coach. With a strong Hungarian accent the old lady talked excitedly about the journey. Where was she being taken? She was startled at every lurch, and recovered almost at once. She wanted to know what the crops were in the fields along which they were passing. She insisted that Georg should warn her as soon as the castle came in sight. Suddenly she asked why he was not in uniform as on the day of his marriage. He tried to explain that a retired officer wore uniform on special occasions only. But she did not listen to his reply. In civilian clothes her son-in-law was less impressive than in uniform, and that was that.

At last the tower of Maria-Licht rose behind the trees. "Mariska!" she cried as the carriage drove through the gate and as, pale with emotion, her daughter rushed down the steps. There was a tempestuous embrace, there were tears, and a stream of Hungarian pet names. Georg felt a little superfluous and left the carriage by the other door.

Joseph was waiting with Aunt Otilie's old bath-chair. It had been oiled and furbished. Joseph was so impressed that he forgot to welcome his master. Georg could not remember having ever counted for so little in his own castle.

At last the old lady released her daughter, wiped the tears with her lace handkerchief, and looked up a little frightened at the steps she would have to climb. Her son-in-law reassured her; she had only to sit down in the chair. He signalled to Franzl who was waiting with some dogs by the stable door. Georg thought that together Joseph and Franzl would have no difficulty in carrying the bath-chair up the steps.

Was it because Franzl considered this method unnecessarily complicated, or was it perhaps that the modish appearance of the maid Brigitte inspired him with a wish to display his strength? Anyhow he silently handed the leashes of the dogs to Joseph, lifted the old lady, complete with bath-chair, in his arms, and without seeming effort carried her up the steps, to the accompaniment of the invalid's frightened Hungarian exclamations and the admiring glances of Brigitte, who was not often treated to such displays. Then he came down with a blush of awkward pride.

Franzl had noticed the quiet admiration in the girl's eyes, and suddenly he felt sure that she would be his wife. This was indeed a miracle. The maids considered Franzl an impregnable fortress. He was a matter of fact and self-centred fellow whose sole pleasure was his work in the woods and who never looked at a woman. And there was another miracle. Brigitte had been engaged for nearly six years to a young man in Graz. They were to be married the following autumn. And now it was suddenly revealed to her that this marriage could never take place, and that henceforth her fate was in the iron hands of this rustic giant with his clear brown eyes and his shy blush. She followed her mistress in some confusion while Franzl took back his dogs from Joseph, too absent-minded to understand that Joseph was playfully reproaching him for having stolen the old lady from him.

The long severe winter gave way to soft and rainy spring. The crops easily made up for lost time, but summer brought new difficulties. The heat was dry and scorching, much manure was needed. Old Frau Lerchenfeld at first humorously sniffed the unexpected smells that blew across from the fields. But soon she insisted on keeping the windows closed although the rooms were oppressively hot. Her daughter begged for fresh air, and the old lady told Brigitte to open the windows, remarking with a sigh that she herself had different views as to the nature of fresh air. She complained to her son-in-law that when manuring Eisengruber took no notice of the direction of the wind and forgot that at this period the Lady of the Castle was bound not to feel her best. Georg soothingly told her that the farmer meant no ill, but he only increased her annoyance when he added that as far as he was concerned he did not think the smell disagreeable at all.

Georg sniffed in the air with satisfaction and even with joy. He was devoted to his fields and wished that, the heat and the drought notwithstanding, they should bear abundant crops, this very year when Heaven had blessed his own marriage. He was on horseback from the crack of dawn and in order not to disturb his wife by his early rising had settled in night-quarters of his own. In an impulse of childish attachment Maria asked her mother to share her bedroom. But it was not long before her mother's uninterrupted company began to weigh on her. She thought she would feel less lonely if left to herself. She wanted, in the quiet of night, to lie and think of Georg, towards whom she had a sense of guilt because she had allowed her mother so completely to take possession of her. When she went out with Georg in the evening she sobbed out her longing to him and promised that as soon as her mother left she would once more be entirely his. As the old lady however had not yet breathed a word about leaving, Georg delicately passed over the subject and silently took his wife in

his arms. In the discreet solitude of the wood, they exchanged ardent and tender kisses like a secretly engaged couple.

At night Maria was always exhausted by all the knitting and crocheting, but Frau von Lerchenfeld kept egging her on with the sacred zeal that animated herself. The piles of clothes that were waiting for the arrival of Georg's son had grown impressively high. And Anna Krone and Trudi had caught the infection through Brigitte, while at the farm Magdalene Eisengruber devoted her scant leisure to the confection of yet more baby clothes.

This almost frightening increase of the wardrobe was brought to a sudden end by the departure of the old lady. It took place in August as the result of a frightful misunderstanding. She expected the child to be a girl, and she never tired of enumerating the advantages of a daughter over a son. She put pink ribbons in all the clothes. Maria dared not remove them, but at night, when she was sure that her mother was asleep, she cried over these pink ribbons which were bound to hurt Georg. No doubt it would have been wiser to be candid with her mother. This at any rate would have saved the old lady a painful surprise. One day looking in a cupboard for the pattern of a little frock she came across two large rolls of blue ribbon hidden under a pile of finished clothes. Maria did not try to defend herself but fell sobbing in the arms of her mother.

The old lady was entirely put out by this treason. "Must he have his own way then?" she asked with trembling voice. Maria raised her confused and tear-stained face. "But Mama, I also prefer a son!"

"You?" the old lady said in a toneless voice. "And why did you then not say a single word that first afternoon when I had just arrived, and he kept talking about his son?"

"I was waiting for you to say something, Mama! and when you said nothing at all I thought that you preferred . . .!"

"Oh, my God . . ." sobbed old Frau von Lerchenfeld putting her arms around her child. "How could you think such a thing of me. In my own time I did so want to have a boy. But first there was your sister and then you, and then the doctor said there were to be no more! How can I stay here any longer now. If there is a girl, you'll both say it is my fault, the fault of my pink ribbons."

She pulled a pink ribbon out of the little vest she had just finished. "I'll have to go now, I'll have to go," she repeated disconsolately. No doubt she meant it, but at the same time she hoped that her daughter would beg her to stay. Then she would allow herself to be pressed for a long time, and finally she would give way. But she noticed that though her daughter tried to reassure her as to the fatal results of the pink ribbon, she did not say a word about her staying. Later, when she was more self-possessed, she took the initiative.

"Mariska," she said that night, "you've heard what I said this afternoon."

Both Maria and the Major looked at her a little anxiously. "I mean about my not being able to stay any longer." She was answering her own question, and again she noticed with a pang that though they both looked very kindly at her they did not protest. She knew for certain now that this strange man whom she had received with such confidence in her house had stolen her child from her. She continued talking very fast. "What is there left for me to do here? You have enough clothes for the little one. Ilonka and her husband are back from their holiday."

Maria felt the injustice she was doing to her mother like a physical hurt. But she could not bring herself to utter the request for which Mama was waiting: "Do stay a little longer!"

The old lady was sufficiently magnanimous to crush her disappointment. When she left the following morning she was the more self-possessed of the two. She even winked at Brigitte when the forester Franzl turned up to take leave from her. Her conscience was clearer than that of her daughter. When that evening Maria found herself once more in the arms of her husband she sobbed: "Now we've sent Mama away from here!"

A few days later there came a letter from Graz just like those she used to write. "My darling Mariska, we've all laughed very much here because of my pink ribbons and they all think me ridiculous because as a result I didn't want to stay any longer with you . . ."

That year there were no other guests at Maria-Licht. Otto von Sterneck had promised to come shooting but he wrote that his regiment was taking part in the autumn manœuvres. As it happened the Major and his wife were not looking forward to any visits. Their life was entirely filled by their expectation. Georg did not go out so much and in the end even cut short his morning ride, because he had noticed that Maria found it difficult to bear his absence. She was growing heavy and their usual short walk towards dusk was beginning to tire her. There was much rain in those days and the way was muddy and full of puddles. She liked the evenings that were already growing longer, when they both sat by the fire. Sometimes she put her hand into his as though seeking protection. The solemn melancholy of autumn in the midst of the woods, and the wind howling in the chimney, gave her a vague sense of anxiety.

A doctor came to examine her. He was called Abel Prisswitz, and Maria thought him very young indeed. She would have preferred an older physician. But Dr. Prisswitz soon gained her confidence. With his healthy red cheeks and his sturdy blond-haired wrists and hands he seemed to be the typical robust country doctor who does not look at

the dark side of a case before his patient is dead and buried. He told her that he had left the university in order to take up the practice of his uncle who died two years ago. He died of a liver disease which, said the young nephew and heir, could have been cured by a daring operation. Those people, he said, imagined that one wanted to kill them simply in order to get hold of their practice a little sooner. This was how Abel Prisswitz had to give up his fond ambition of becoming a great surgeon. His mother and his sisters, his aunts and his cousins all argued that one could not possibly allow such a beautiful practice to escape, especially when it was simply thrown into one's arms. For a moment Abel Prisswitz assumed a melancholy expression, and then as though he felt himself that this melancholy was ill-suited to his exuberant health he added with a laugh: "Yes, yes, little lady, and so we'll have a son in January." He called Maria alternately "little lady" or "my little Baroness."

After the examination he went with Georg into the smoking-room. From him he heard that old Frau von Lerchenfeld wanted it to be a grand-daughter. But he was as reassuring to Georg as he had been to his wife. "What a world it would be if grandmothers were also given a say in these matters! No, we'll see to it that it's a son!" Maybe some of Dr. Prisswitz's conviction was drawn from the bottle of old Tokay for which he had accounted almost entirely by himself.

Maria kept going almost to the end. At the beginning of December however, her legs refused to carry her and she took to bed. Dr. Prisswitz came to have a look. "Yes, she's none too strong," he admitted to Georg. But even before he had realized the impression made by his first words he discovered a number of reasons for optimism. "She certainly is brave, our little Baroness!" This time, he said, he was not going to drink so much of that deuced Tokay. But the first glass washed away his good intentions. Later in the kitchen Krone told how the young doctor had sighed and muttered to himself the whole way back. "Whatever did he say?" asked Anna who was not without concern about the case and would have liked to know the Doctor's opinion. "Oh, it was all in Latin, all in Latin" replied Krone shaking off his boots into which the rain-water had penetrated.

On Christmas Even Krone had to hurry with the sleigh for the Doctor. The Major sent word that he had to go as fast as he could. Anna was just standing on a chair in order to light up the Christmas tree. She pushed her husband out of the door and went with him to help him harness the horses. Krone said he was afraid the Doctor would not be easy to find, he was a bachelor and quite likely to be spending Christmas Eve with friends. She told him on no account to return home without Dr. Prisswitz. She followed the sleigh with her eyes till it had disappeared, then she drew a deep breath and went

upstairs to ask if she could be of any assistance. She had sent Joseph to the farm to warn Magdalena Eisengruber.

In the corner of the large bedroom on the first floor stood a minute Christmas tree. Underneath, carefully wrapped in red tissue-paper, were the surprises that would have been opened on Maria's bed if meanwhile this greater surprise had not been announced. In between the first pangs, her forehead and cheeks covered with small pearls of perspiration, Maria was looking at the burning candles and thinking how beautiful it was that during this Christmas night she was going to present Georg with his first child. Now that God was giving such a clear sign it would have been faint-hearted to have any fear. She turned her face encouragingly to Georg who was waiting watch in hand for the arrival of Dr. Prisswitz. She had the fullest confidence in Magdalena Eisengruber, who had given birth to four children without medical assistance, and who, helped by Anna Krone, was now making everything ready. She no longer felt the need to hold her husband's hand. Now that the great hour had arrived it seemed as though she could do without his support. She told him not to stay because she felt that with him in the room she could not utter an occasional moan. He was to come back, she said, when all was over, and meanwhile he ought to try and find something to do. But he was not to worry.

He gave way before her insistence: he was no use in any case. He vaguely wandered from room to room. It was as though he had lost his way in the castle, and the walls were staring at him chilly and hostile. He met Trudi who asked him, her throat dry with anxiety, whether everything was going well with the Frau Baroness. He nodded. It seemed to him that his nervousness was unseemly; he looked at his watch and though he clearly visualized and even memorized the position of the hands, he did not connect it with any notion of time. "The doctor . . . the doctor." These words were hammering in his brain. His hands behind his back, he was standing by one of the windows trying to catch a glimpse of the court. He wondered whether the sleigh had returned, but he could only see the dancing snow-flakes that shone in the light from the window. Behind them was the night black and impenetrable.

Suddenly he remembered that from the same window he had once looked at Hannerl when he sent her away. Oh, if he had wronged her, these hours of waiting were his punishment. He felt he could not breathe by this window and once more he moved on. Suddenly he fancied that Maria was calling, but when he tried to enter the bedroom, Magdalena Eisengruber moved him back with a kindly gesture. "Don't distress her! Everything is going well so far. If there were any change I'd send for you at once. We're with her, you know." For a moment she communicated her calm to him. He breathed once

more. It would be so much easier to bear if only he could do something—Why had he not gone himself to fetch the doctor? Why was he not wildly driving through the snowstorm with the reins firm in his grip, whipping on the horses? Anyhow, Krone must by now be on the way back with the doctor.

He did not know of course that at that moment Krone was still chasing round Klagenfurt in search of Dr. Prisswitz who had gone to celebrate the Christmas with unknown friends. He was sent from one house to the other, and in despair he began to interrogate passers-by. Occasionally he added comments to his enquiries, and complained about the negligence of doctors who left no address behind when they went on the spree. It was only when he began to talk about his wife at home and to tell how she was waiting for him with the Christmas tree all alight that he remembered Anna's command not on any account to return without Dr. Prisswitz. Then, with a sigh, he flicked his whip through the snow and continued his barren search. At last, near the Aegidien Church, he saw a merry company of gentlemen and shouted the usual question to them. Had they seen Dr. Prisswitz? One of them stepped into the light of the high windows through which floated Christmas canticals and organ music. He placed an unsteady hand on the sleigh and stammered: "And who is it you want?"

"You, Doctor," exclaimed Krone with relief. "It's for the Baroness at Maria-Licht."

Some minutes passed before Abel Prisswitz was able to absorb the unexpected announcement. At last he turned uncertainly to his friends who were standing against the church wall roaring with laughter. Then he made a brave attempt to steady himself. "Right!" he said with a tone of determination that was intended to deceive Krone, and lifted his foot to step into the sleigh. His friends approached to tuck him in, but several of them rolled forward over his legs. Krone had to lift one by his collar before he could drive away. The friends waved and shouted after him and Prisswitz still thought it great fun to be picked up in the street and carried away to the castle of a Baroness. As the sleigh was turning out of the town he began to sing at the top of his voice, but after a while the singing stopped and Krone felt a tug at his arm. When he stopped and looked round he saw a pair of hollow frightened eyes.

"Where was it you wanted me? . . . At Maria-Licht? Turn round. I haven't got my instrument-case with me."

Krone turned back to the surgery and it was nearly midnight when they finally took the road to the castle. Pale and distressed, Dr. Prisswitz sat behind him. He was completely sobered now, and, bending forward, he asked: "When did it start? How long have you

been in town? What did they tell you at my home? . . . that they did not know where I had gone? Oh, the fool! the cursed fool!" Dr. Prisswitz was referring to the servant he had inherited from his uncle together with the practice and who had apparently misinformed Krone.

Meanwhile Maria Weygand was fighting her painful struggle. She had placed her faith in the blessed powers of the Christmas night, but without the gentle and consoling words of Anna Krone and without the loving, encouraging hands of Magdalena Eisengruber she would have begun to doubt these powers.

An hour after midnight her last and most pitiful cry rent the overheated room. Then silence fell. Georg who was in the library, still waiting for the arrival of the doctor, had placed his hands over his ears in order not to hear the cries of his wife. The silence made him lift his head. Had the decision fallen now? He did not find the courage or the strength to go and ask. So he stayed in his chair and listened. They had promised to warn him. Could they have forgotten him?

Through the windows eyeless demons looked at him . . .

Then the silence seemed to end. Around him, the whispers of life had returned. There were vague sounds of stealthy, hurrying footsteps. A door was opened and was closed. He recovered a little of his grip on the outside world. He drew himself up, surmounted the weakness in his knees, and rose expectantly when from the half-darkness of the passage the figure of Anna Krone appeared. In the glow of the candles her face was deadly pale, but there was a smile on her lips.

He followed her, but in the passage he rushed ahead of her.

As he entered the bedroom Magdalena Eisengruber placed her finger on her lips and pointed at his wife who had fallen asleep from exhaustion. Then she handed him his son, a solid little fellow with a red face, fists clenched and his little knees doubled up, because of the unexpected cold of being born.

Precisely at this moment Krone drew up the sleigh outside. With a hurry that was no longer needed Dr. Prisswitz rushed upstairs with his black bag and appeared at the door of the bedroom where Georg, too helplessly happy to harbour resentment, had forgotten his despair at the delay. He signalled to the doctor to come and look at the child.

But Dr. Prisswitz did not dare appear before the baby. From a distance he assured himself that all was well with it. Then, the only unhappy one among these people, he bent guiltily over the mother. She awakened and looked at him with a weak smile.

CHAPTER FIVE

IF RUDI SHOULD DIE

So now Georg had his son, though for the time being he seemed to belong to every one except himself. The women managed him, carried him around, cuddled him, washed him, dressed him with the clothes made by his grandmother and his mother, and all Georg was allowed to do was to admire him before he was put to bed. With his fists clenched in front of his little nose, he slept for hours in the pink half-light of his cradle, and no one, not even his father, the Major, was allowed to disturb him.

When in the darkness of the night he raised his plaintive voice Georg was allowed to lift the child carefully from the cradle and hand it to his wife. In the half-covered light of the lamp they looked together at the satin-like sheen of the tiny head with the perky crest of thin gold-blond hair and they exchanged a smile because of the greed with which the small lips pressed themselves to the mother's breast. In spite of her husband's fears Maria proved able to feed the child herself. The Slovene wet nurse who answered Georg's advertisement was sent away disappointed after a week.

On the day after Christmas Otto von Sterneck paid a surprise visit in order to celebrate New Year's Eve with his friend Georg at Maria-Licht. Georg was delighted. He put his arm round the shoulder of his friend and took him to see his wife and his son. To Maria's dismay Otto lifted the child from the cradle and held it in the light by the window. Then he stated "He looks like you, Georg, a genuine Weygand! Has he got a godfather yet? If there is nobody better in the offing I apply for the job."

"I had intended to ask you," said Georg.

"Yes, so you are telling me now," said Otto teasingly, and he placed the child in its mother's arms. "He looks in his place there, Maria. How many more of this kind are we going to get?"

Laughing, he walked out with Georg. Maria followed them with her pensive eyes.

With his friend Otto and with Eisengruber as the second witness Georg went next day to register his son. When he saw the town clerk writing for the first time the two names Rudolf and Otto in conjunction, he invited him to the christening meal on New Year's eve.

The Major invited some thirty guests for the dinner that was beginning towards evening. Two of the maids from the farm were

helping in the kitchen, and at table Joseph was assisted by the two waiters of the Klagenfurt restaurant which was closed during the winter months. The guests ate and drank, raised their glasses, and sang a New Year's song so loudly that on the long dining-table the candelabra of antlers trembled. Otto von Sterneck addressed his friend and host: "Look at this man, the oak with its green leaves that has grown through wind and tempest! May he get twelve sons, and may the twelve of them resemble their father."

Shortly before midnight Georg went upstairs to his wife in order to wish her a happy New Year if he found her awake. He opened the door with great care, but his precaution was unnecessary: she was not asleep.

Early in the evening when the merriment was at its highest and she could hear the singing in her room, Maria would have liked to get up and to sit down among the guests. But this also was very good. Georg was enjoying himself while she protected his child, the child that had liberated him from his superb isolation and put him back among men.

Then she heard the music and the Bridal March that had been played on her arrival at Seekirchen, and it made her weep. The Burgomaster's wife came up to see her and to bring her a bouquet of winter flowers. Other ladies shyly peered round the corner of the door and asked if they might come in just one minute to see the baby. They all admired it greatly and said it looked so much like its father. And now the father himself had escaped from the festive-table because at the dawn of the new year his thoughts went to his wife and to his son. She asked him to sit down for a moment by her bedside: she could not sleep anyhow and she wanted him to tell her quickly what was going on downstairs. Suddenly she was moved to put her arms round him, and to whisper in his ear: "What more do you want from me in this new year?" He released himself with a very red face. "Hush," he said, almost brusquely, "you must have some rest first of all." But while she looked him in the face she read from the eyes that were avoiding her glance the as yet unquenched desire for more, for a still richer unfolding of his belated wealth.

When the clock on the tower was on the point of chiming in the new year he kissed her and hurried back to the dining-room where the guests were already standing up. He was just in time to raise his glass with them. Listening to the chimes that were so full of meaning and staring at the soft golden gleam in his glass, he could only see Maria. He was still aglow with the glance of her deep eyes. He stood among these men as one on whom there is a blessing: he was almost afraid that his look would betray his happiness and cause someone to envy him.

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Little Rudolf looked with his friendly, quiet blue eyes at his parents and at all those who bent over his cradle. Most of all he rejoiced at the blunt sniffing head of Bismark, the large hound which his father intended to be his protector and his comrade. The dog already had an instinctive understanding of what was expected of him. The space in front of the cradle became his fixed resting place and there he slumbered for hours on end, his fearsome head with the bare fangs resting on his paws.

In the spring a foal was born which Rudolf would not be able to mount before he was seven or eight. It was called Claudius after a horse Georg owned when he was a cadet.

By then Maria was once more moving about. She seemed to have grown even lovelier. Her smile had the mysterious joy by which one recognises a young mother, and as her forces revived her energy became almost frightening. She wanted to look after the child entirely unassisted, and at the same time to direct the spring-cleaning; she also took a great interest in everything that happened on the farm. She talked about resuming the piano lessons which she had given up the previous summer before the arrival of her mother. Was it because she wanted her young teacher to see her son? But he hardly noticed the child, and while she was still singing its praises he was already talking of the symphony he wanted to compose. She was looking forward months ahead to the autumn when Brigitte would arrive as a bride, not only because she cordially wished her happiness, but also because Brigitte would naturally want to see little Rudolf. But when autumn really did arrive Maria suddenly grew quiet. Her eyes once more had that expression of waiting and looking in the distance, and by now Georg knew the meaning of this. Seated by Rudolf's cradle she gently stroked his head and whispered a secret to him which others were not yet to know. Of course she did not mind that his father happened to overhear it.

Just as the big dog kept watch before the cradle, so Georg was again mounting guard over his wife. The following summer a second child would be born, and Maria suggested that if it happened to be a girl she should be called Elisabeth after his first wife, who had never known the blessing of motherhood, although she must have longed for it more than Maria herself. Georg had never explained this matter with complete clearness to her. Maria considered that she could make this present to her husband's first wife. She had so much.

In the autumn the marriage of Brigitte and Franzl was celebrated. Georg led the bride into the church on his arm. Franzl followed walking in a dream. It was only now that one could see how young his heart really was. The other girls looked at the couple with barely

hidden envy. The radiant bride and the strong handsome bridegroom in his forester's suit of green cloth were a pleasant sight indeed.

No longer need Maria and Georg sit by themselves before the fire that winter. Bismark lay snoring on the hearth, and little Rudolf slept in the cradle. Maria was not afraid now of the voices of the wind in the chimney. She had her husband and her son with her, and within her life once more triumphed over the forebodings of death.

Spring arrived. The cradle could now be placed by the open window and Rudolf could be lifted out to look at the swallows who had returned from the distant south. The child's earnest eyes tried to follow the silhouettes of the birds as they glided past. And thus summer drew near.

This time Georg was determined to go for the doctor himself. When the time arrived he drove fast along the road through the wood to Klagenfurt. Doctor Prisswitz was ready to accompany him: the last few days he had hardly ventured outside the house.

After a night that was hard for Maria the child was born. "A girl! What did I say? Girls are always so much more difficult for the mother!" exclaimed Dr. Prisswitz. Later, when he was alone with Georg, the doctor felt that he had sufficiently recovered prestige to venture upon a little homily to the happy father. "Yes, what I mean to say is . . . It's arrived rather soon after the first one! It might have been wiser to have had a little pause, say a year."

Georg felt how earnestly this shy warning was intended. But, if he wanted to see his children grow up, he could hardly afford to wait, at his age. Besides, had it not been Maria herself, who . . .? But after all, this was no concern of Dr. Prisswitz. He silently opened the bottle of champagne with which he considered the arrival of a daughter should be celebrated. Exhausted by the heavy night, the doctor thirstily drained his glass.

During the summer old Frau von Lerchenfeld paid another visit to admire her two grandchildren for the first time. She tried hard to divide her favours impartially between the two, but it was not difficult to see that her preference went to Rudi who was beginning to walk through the room on his sturdy little legs. Unhappily, he appeared a little shy of her at first. The child seemed to be taken aback by seeing the old lady move in such an unusual way in her bath-chair. His greatest friend continued to be Bismark, the strong companion with whom he rolled on the ground to the horror of his grandmama. The first word he spoke was neither mama nor papa, but the name of his dog. The animal obeyed every one of his orders, and the little boy showed no fear of the dog: he played with it on the ground, and when he was thrown over he rose again unconcerned. The old lady

could not understand how Maria and Georg dared leave the child with this fierce monster. She continued to be afraid of it and when Bismark arrived to sniff at her grandson while she held him on her knee, she shouted for help.

Since Rudi did not understand her anyhow she decided to talk Hungarian to him. She also told Bismark what she thought of him in her own language, but Rudi followed the dog through the room with loving eyes and preferred him to the ticking watch with which she tried to capture his attention. The old lady once went on an expedition that was not by any means easy in view of her infirmities. She was curious to know how her former maid Brigitte had settled down in her new state. Excited by the honour that was being done to her, Brigitte rushed away to make coffee. But this was not what the old lady wanted. She wanted to know how this maid who had led such an easy and almost luxurious life with her, was feeling now that she was the wife of a forester. "I am very happy indeed, Madam," declared Brigitte, and although she spoke with conviction the old lady could hardly believe her. "I can't say that you are looking very well!" Brigitte blushed. "Oh, Madam, there's another reason for that—" "What! As early as this!" exclaimed Frau von Lerchenfeld with big eyes—"But we've been married nearly a year, Madam!" said Brigitte, with alarm, hoping that perhaps this would make the old lady laugh. But she shook her head dubiously. "Dear, dear . . . Well, well . . ." was all her comment.

When she heard that after two months Maria was not yet allowed up, she found it necessary to warn her too. "Well, my child, don't you and your husband think there has been enough of this now?" Maria averted her face. "You can see for yourself how nervous it has made you," declared the old lady. "Surely there's nothing to cry about!"

Her warnings had more success with Georg. He admitted that it had been rather hard on Maria to have two children so soon one after the other. A little comforted by this admission, his mother-in-law continued: "And she ought not to feed them herself, seeing her condition. I can't understand why the doctor allows it."—"But you know how keen Maria is on it."—The old lady made a gesture of irritation. "Keen on it! At your age you ought to have enough sense not to take any notice of a woman's whims. What if she ruins her health with it!" Georg felt irritated and ashamed and did not answer.

He tried very cautiously to discuss the matter with Maria, but he was startled at the vehemence of her reaction: "So Mama has been at you too, has she! You both still consider me a child that can be told what to do and what not to do! I can understand such a thing from Mama, but from you!" She burst into tears and he found it difficult to soothe her down. "And I am going to feed it myself,

Georg," she sobbed. "What does it matter if I've got to stay in bed a little longer? Everything goes just as well without me. Here at least is a thing no one else can do for me."

He stayed a long while by her bed holding her hand; his love and his admiration for her had grown immense. She asked him to give her the little child, who was crying for her mother. When she held it in her arms and felt its little mouth taking her milk she grew quieter. She looked up silently at her husband with a pouting little smile.

Then they began to discuss her mother. "It's too dreadful," said Maria, dreamily looking into the distance. "I've so longed for her coming. I wanted to see her, to show the children to her, and now that she's here I can't bear her. Of course, she's aware of it and she's trying hard to make things just as they used to be between us. But it's no longer possible. She always wants to be consulted and to have the final word. She must learn that she has to grow old, that she must resign herself to being an old lady, detached from the realities of our life, a memory of the past that is still present in person. Some mothers can do it, once their daughters are safely settled. Then they become grandmothers of their free consent, and you can cherish them and treat them like children. Mama has too much energy. I am still the child she has to advise."

As he listened to Maria, Georg felt that he would have to make his own contribution to the old lady's education. Henceforth he would systematically tell her that she was right, and go his own way in everything. Maybe the old lady realized that her son-in-law was now attacking her in the one way against which she could not resist. Perhaps she was even grateful for this. After all, it does make life easy always to be told that one is right, and yet to have no authority. It softens the nerves, and it gives to old age something like a gentle slumber, a deserved and dignified reward after a hard and righteous existence. She began to sing the praises of Georg, although formerly she had never found words enough to criticise him. "You've got a very intelligent husband, you know," she told her surprised daughter. "He understands me. He entirely agrees with me that one can't treat you as an adult. I'm glad you're in such good hands. I need no longer worry about you now."

Maria smiled with relief.

In the early days of October, Frau von Lerchenfeld departed, very pleased with her stay, and beaming because she had such a reasonable son-in-law to whom she could so safely entrust her daughter. She said she did not know when she would come back. She was growing older every day, and it was a long journey . . . a long journey. . . .

A week before her mother's departure Maria got up at last and went for her first short walk. She was able to see her mother off. On the way back, in the carriage, she leaned her head against her husband's

shoulder and asked in a slightly tired voice: "Well? Has Mama thoroughly convinced you that we've got to be reasonable in future?"

"Yes, she has convinced me," he said earnestly.

She looked at him and her voice sounded disappointed: "Are you in earnest?"

He felt uncomfortable. "Maria, it really was too much for you, this time."

"Do you mean to say that I can't have another child even if I want to?"

"I really don't know what you couldn't do. But what I do know is that I don't want it."

She turned from him as though offended. Was she playing a comedy? Her temperament and the unexpectedness of her reactions were still surprising. Happily he knew what he wanted. He wanted to keep her. Even if he had not been told by Dr. Prisswitz, he would have realized that he had no right to endanger her life once more.

Meanwhile he was weak enough to be the first to talk. "Maria," he said softly, "how could I expect still more from you than you've already given me? Don't you realize that at my age I've been given more happiness than I could ever expect?"

"Well, let's agree then that we're defeated, not because I'm too weak but because you're feeling old," she said viciously.

Of course he was hurt by these words. "You know I don't feel too old," he said, "but you've just had to stay in bed for three months."

"That was only because I could allow myself the luxury. Had I been a farmer's wife I might have got up the same day to milk the cows, like the woman of whom you told me once. But don't let's discuss it any more. As long as you're satisfied . . ." Her listless voice betrayed contempt.

"But Maria, do tell me . . . What had you expected then?"

She turned fiercely towards him. "I'll tell you! When I married you, I thought: Here is a man made to have sons and daughters about him; he has been unable so far to find a wife who could give them to him: I'll be that wife! And do you know what Father Aigner, yes, Father Aigner who now fancies that he also has to preach carefulness to me . . . Do you know what he said to me during our first conversation? He said that you were a man to have twelve children!"

Her face was flushed and her eyes were shining. He looked at her with amazement. He found it difficult to overcome his own emotion. She seemed so lovely, at this moment, and he would have liked to tell her so. But he tried to register amusement at the idea of twelve children. "A dozen! I think Father Aigner should have got married himself!"

"Oh, not a dozen! I know!" she said defending herself. "But as we are now . . . No, I don't think it's enough for you."

"And yet I'll have to be satisfied with two," he said with a laugh. "I do really intend that you shan't go through all this a third time."

She grew pale and her face became hard. "Then it sounds as though I had ceased being your wife," she said in a flat voice.

"Now what do you mean by that?"

"Don't pretend you don't understand me!"

He sighed and was silent. She also did not speak and again she turned her face away from him. Unable to bear this he tried to seize her hand. When she tried to pull it away he held it with a hard grip and she turned her head to him. Only then did he realize how profoundly he had hurt her. "Maria!" he exclaimed in despair about this quarrel, "we've got to be reasonable. If I had to lose you . . ."

She shut her eyes and preserved her sphinx-like silence. She allowed him to kiss her and to draw her head towards him. She even leaned against his chest, but she kept her lips pursed together. She was not going to be reasonable. She wanted to remain his wife. She could not yet renounce the picture she had made for herself: Georg, her husband, in the midst of the children life had so long denied him.

Perhaps she knew better than he what he wanted.

They did not revert to the subject, but they continued their silent battle. When she found out that Georg was in earnest she cried and kept aloof for days on end. She acted as though she were hurt in her pride. If he was able to control his senses so perfectly, he could do without a wife altogether! She worked upon him and he fought desperately against desire. He had never wanted her so much.

In his weaker moments he thought sometimes that it might be good to discuss the matter with a friend. Perhaps Father Aigner would be able to prove to Maria that she was wrong. But Georg was by no means sure himself of his position. This was why he continued his lonely battle, with the dark foreboding that the moment would come when it would all prove to have been of no avail. Maria was stronger than he.

In the end she achieved her victory in an unexpected manner. Perhaps the idea came to her at the very moment she uttered it. In the glow of the night-light her large eyes looked at him:

"And if Rudi should die?" she said.

As she spoke them, the words had an appalling sound. Never in his life was Georg able to forget how, in the middle of the night, she had suddenly put this cold and almost defiant question:

"And if Rudi should die . . . What then?"

The fear of death, called in by Maria as an ally to threaten him in the life of his son, drove him into her arms. It was a panic flight. Half-opened in sensual ecstasy, Maria's mouth showed a smile of almost painful satisfaction at her final triumph.

After this night he was lost. She held him in her power and no longer took his resistance seriously. She told him that she was expecting a child once more. It proved to be a mistake. When, afterwards, it was true she did not tell him. But he could read it in her eyes. Her triumph had something diabolical and sent a shudder through him. He tried to place himself in a state of self-condemnation. She answered merely with a mocking smile that seemed to challenge fate. How could he have resisted this boundless audacity?

One day in February he rode to Klagenfurt to inform Dr. Prisswitz. The doctor was obviously startled. He came to examine Maria and told her in guarded words that he advised a step which the law allowed only in extreme cases. It took some time before she understood him and then she laughed in his face. She did not deem the matter worthy of being mentioned to Georg. "One would have thought it was the poor doctor himself who was going to have the baby," was her only comment when she told him about the visit.

In March Brigitte presented Franzl with a healthy son. Maria took this as a good omen and went to the forester's house to see the child and to present the young mother with fruit and other comforts.

Although her own child was not expected until late in the summer, the doctor already looked in now and then. He seemed to feel uncomfortable about something. One day he said to Georg: "Your wife seems unusually heavy to me. She will have to take to bed very early." Every one in the castle knew what was going to take place. The men cracked jokes about the Baron's haste. But they grew silent when the maids talked about the condition of the Baroness and reminded them of the long months she had been kept in bed after her last confinement. Anna Krone was nervous and ill at ease. It was the first time she had doubts about her idol, the Major. So far she had understood everything, even his affair with Hannerl. But this went beyond her.

The first pangs began one September afternoon. Doctor Prisswitz was excited and spoke gruffly to the two women who had everything in readiness for his arrival. Happily the birth took place much more quickly than on the previous occasion.

"A daughter," said Dr. Prisswitz to the mother, who was looking at him. With a touching attempt to be brave she whispered: "But it isn't over yet, is it?"

He realized with a shock that all along she knew what he had not even had the courage to announce beforehand to the father. "No . . . it isn't over. Clench your teeth once more," he said, struggling with his rising emotion. She gave a dull, resigned nod and her head dropped back.

"Not finished yet!" said Magdalena Eisengruber, who was

wrapping up the newborn girl and whose hands suddenly began to tremble. Anna Krone, deadly pale, kept silent. She also had suspected without daring to speak.

Maria was delivered of the other child, a boy, under a narcotic. Anna Krone wanted to rush to the Major in order to put an end to the torture of waiting that had lasted since the doctor's arrival. But Dr. Prisswitz held her back. "I'll go myself." It was not clear what exactly determined this decision. He appeared to be in no hurry, and very deliberately scrubbed his hands.

When Georg saw the doctor himself and his tense expression, he was sure that he came to announce his wife's death. Perhaps this was the impression Dr. Prisswitz wanted to create. He put two big fists on the table and addressed the Lord of the Manor who was standing up attempting to control the trembling of his mouth:

"This is the end of it."

The Major continued to look at the doctor's face, waiting for details that did not seem to come. Gradually he began to understand. This time again Maria had survived. Suddenly speech came back to him: "You don't mind if I go to see her, do you, Doctor?"

The question was an attempt to remind the young doctor that he had been called in exclusively as a physician. No doubt he had the right to give a warning, but not in the grotesque form he had allowed himself on this occasion.

Doctor Prisswitz answered the request which was not a request with a rough gesture of indifference. He realized not without bitterness that the door had been banged in his face. With something like a grim enjoyment of the surprise that awaited the father, he followed him. With much self-control Georg stepped towards the bedroom door at the end of the passage.

CHAPTER SIX

THE MAJOR'S QUARTET

THIS time Maria had to submit to the arrival of a wet nurse; she would not have had the strength to feed both children. It happened that Dr. Prisswitz had just heard of a wet nurse he could recommend. It was Frau Weizl from the Loibel Valley. Her husband had met with an accident and she had come to town in order to support her family. Her appearance betrayed no signs of her months of appalling poverty. On her round arms she still wore the red-brown colouring of the mountains. In the evening she entertained the assembled company in the kitchen with stories about her former existence. Her stupid husband had been careless when cutting down a tree in the wood, although he should have known better. There were six sons at home eating the clothes off his back. Her voice was hoarse and high-pitched, and her audience wanted to laugh at her most pathetic stories. When the accident occurred she thought that God had decided on her ruin. But she found that though her husband might be an invalid he was as keen as ever to get into bed with her. "Michl," she told him, "do your best and see to it that I'm in a condition to earn something as a wet nurse in town!" On previous occasions she had milk in abundance, and this time the supply seemed unlimited. Her husband had seen to it that whatever happened she got enough food. Sometimes it had almost broken her heart to eat as she did while her children looked on hungrily. When her time drew near she packed a little bundle of baby-clothes and went trudging to Klagenfurt. On the road she met a farmer who was returning from market. He placed her among the pigs on his cart and took her towards Maria-Rain. Before they got there, just on the bridge across the Drau, she felt that her hour had arrived. The farmer put her down and drove away as fast as he could, and the child was born while she was all alone in a meadow by the waterside. A woman who lived in the neighbourhood found her and took her in. At last a carriage came with that young doctor who had been ever so kind to her and who took her away to the castle. Well, here she was, and she earned more in a week than her husband did in a month when he still had two healthy legs underneath him. Frau Weizl ended the story with tears in her eyes, and the others looked a little shamefaced because they had laughed so much while she told it.

Yes, she was healthy indeed, and her own little boy was a small

Hercules with red hair and dark eyes. He did not go short, for his mother had ample substance for three.

This time, Georg was very worried about Maria. Not only was she weak, but she was very nervous. She fancied that because she could not feed the twins she was failing in her duty. She lay for hours, her face turned to the wall, without asking to see the two babies. She told Georg that she was not worth anything and that he would have done better to take another wife four years ago. Although she was very reluctant to see her, the wet nurse was at last allowed upstairs. Frau Weizl also felt nervous and as soon as she came in she burst into tears. Happily she recovered her composure when Maria asked her whether she was properly looked after. She swore that she could not have been happier, that the Herr Baron had arranged everything so nicely and that the two children drank so well. Maria enquired after her own boy and she said she would show him one day, but Maria insisted that she should fetch him up at once, admired him, and promised to find some baby clothes for him.

Frau Weizl felt so grateful that she told the astonished Maria her whole story. In the middle of the narrative the twins began to cry. Frau Weizl got up, shook her head, and took the two infants from their cradle. She sat down with her legs wide apart, opened the blouse which was never buttoned up very carefully, and gave both babies their share. Meanwhile Maria held Frau Weizl's little boy and looked on with amazement; the child's mother gave a pleased nod. The room was very quiet. Maria lay and watched the two children she had brought into the world, who had to seek nourishment from another woman.

The twins were christened Angélique and Stephan. Angélique was the name of Georg's mother who had not long survived her husband, the military doctor. Stephan was the name of Maria's Hungarian grandfather. The twins had chestnut-coloured hair and were less sturdy than Rudi and Elisabeth, who continued the stronger Nordic type of the Major.

About Christmas Maria was at last able to walk a little through the house and Georg ventured to leave her for a few days. He wanted to go to Graz to discuss a delicate matter with his wife's sister, Ilonka. Dr. Prisswitz had impressed him with the necessity of taking his wife south for a few months. In a sunnier country she would be better able to get over her depression and to recover her health. When Georg made this suggestion Maria answered with an obstinate refusal. She did not want to leave her children, she was not in need of sun and of warmth and she said that Dr. Prisswitz, the obvious author of the suggestion, had better stop calling.

Georg hoped to enlist the assistance of his sister-in-law in order to

persuade his wife. Ilonka was the elder sister; she was demure and self-possessed. She declared that she would make her see reason. She was ready to leave at once although it meant giving up a number of appointments. Like many childless women she had an overwhelming amount of social engagements. In a few minutes she overcame Maria's resistance. "No, nonsense," she said, "your husband is entitled to a healthy wife and as long as you stay here you'll remain delicate. You've admitted it yourself. Heavens, I wish Fritz offered me such a trip!"

"But what about the children, Ilonka?"

"Are you thinking of taking them all with you by any chance?"

"No, but surely Rudi and Elisabeth could come."

"That wouldn't mean much rest for you, you silly! Let's make a compromise. You can have Rudi."

This concession had already been agreed upon with Georg in the course of the journey.

Maria sighed. She knew that she was defeated as soon as she saw Georg entering the room with Ilonka.

"And who is going to look after the other three?"

"Aunt Frieda. It's all settled."

Everything was indeed settled. They were to leave on the Monday. Ilonka suggested Venice but, although the journey would be longer, Georg thought Nice more suitable. This time of the year there were cold northerly winds in Venice. He would not admit that he disliked the idea of Venice because it was an Austrian town when he was a boy.

Ilonka stayed till the Monday to do Maria's packing. An impressive number of trunks were made ready. Georg travelled several times to Klagenfurt to get all that was necessary. At the last moment an unexpected difficulty arose. Rudi was told that he would be allowed to travel in a train and that he would be shown the sea, a very large water on which he could sail his boat. But he asked at once whether Bismark could also come. Georg expected there would be tears and was sorry that Ilonka should have mentioned the journey beforehand. Maria enquired whether it would really be impossible to take the dog, as Rudi was so keen on it. Her sister wanted to know whether she had taken leave of her senses. Ilonka consoled Rudi with the promise that Bismark would be allowed to see him off at the station and would be there when the station-master blew his whistle. She expected that in the excitement of the journey he would forget about Bismark.

After a painful leave-taking between Maria and her three youngest children, the carriage drove away with the dog running beside it. While Georg went to look after the luggage, Bismark, frightened by the unusual animation on the platform, pressed himself against Rudi, who held him frantically by the collar. Before Ilonka could prevent it, the dog jumped into the compartment and hid himself underneath the

bench. Rudi howled at the top of his voice while Krone tried in vain to pull the growling beast out of his retreat. The end of the story was that Krone had to rush to buy a ticket for Bismark. It was only when the train began to move that the dog reappeared from beneath the bench, placed his heavy paws on the window ledge and looked down at his enemy who had stayed behind on the platform. Maria felt that in one matter at any rate Rudi and she had defeated Ilonka.

Bismark's presence had one advantage: they had the compartment to themselves throughout the journey. During the night the Italian conductor who came to see the tickets exclaimed "Madonna!" when he saw the growling beast and slammed the door without entering. The incident cost Georg a five lira piece next morning. Bismark was already looking upon the compartment as the property of his master and was ready to defend it against men with heavy service boots and buttons that glowed in the dark.

The head porter of the hotel at Nice did not show a trace of surprise when he welcomed the Austrian guests who travelled first-class and could not come to the Riviera without bringing their prehistoric monster. He called all his assistants and very bravely stroked Bismark on the head as though he were an old acquaintance. When they were in their rooms and had received in turn the visit of a chamber-maid, a nurse and a laundress, a negro appeared and told them that he was specially entrusted with the care of the guests' dogs. At the sight of the negro Bismark's hairs bristled and Rudi, who had never seen a black man before, was very frightened.

Georg had reserved a suite with a view on the sea and on the wide promenade with the palm trees. Maria had never been to the south and as she stood with her hand on the marble balustrade with Rudi by her side, she took in the picture through the eyes of the child.

The four of them—Rudi was holding Bismark by the lead—went for a walk along the promenade and through the park where at eleven o'clock a military band played Verdi and Wagner. They lunched at a hotel where the Viennese orchestra attracted a number of Austrian visitors. They soon became familiar figures: the middle-aged man with the carriage of an officer, his charming, somewhat sad-looking young wife, the blond little boy and the impossibly large dog.

It was dusk when they arrived back at Seekirchen. On the open platform along which an icy March wind blew, Aunt Frieda was waiting for them, a grave, attenuated figure, hidden in her muffler and furs. All her news was good. In her gratitude and joy Maria kissed her dear old aunt three, four times on her cold bony cheeks, and then they entered the coach to drive to Maria-Licht. Bismark ran ahead of the horses, barking loudly, as though to guide them through the falling darkness. He plunged his nose voluptuously into the powdery

snow that was heaped up along the side of the road. As soon as she was home Maria rushed to the nursery. She cried and laughed at the same time when she saw how big the twins had grown, and she called her husband who was still talking to Joseph and Anna Krone downstairs. "Quick, look at them, Georg!" With Stephan in her arms she ran to the little bed in which Elisabeth was looking at her with laughing eyes: the child still recognized her! What a delicious homecoming it was! Everybody thought that the Baroness looked much better than when she left. The journey had really improved her health.

Aunt Frieda announced her departure for the following Saturday. Maria had little difficulty in persuading her to stay a few more days. In the end she remained throughout spring and during summer as well. When the weather grew colder she took her departure, much to the regret of Maria and her husband, who had already grown attached to the quiet and unassuming little woman. Rudi, who ordered her about as though she were another Bismark, was equally sorry.

The same autumn saw the departure of Frau Weizl. She left with a trunk packed with useful presents and with a post office savings book that would easily see her through the winter. Her youngest son and she were dressed as though her husband were the richest farmer in the Loibel Valley. Krone drove her to the station at Klagenfurt where she was able to take the local train to Ferlach. He assisted her with her luggage, which was too much for her to carry, and as the train left he uttered a groan of satisfaction. Prosperity had not improved Frau Weizl, and the staff at Maria-Licht were happy to see the last of her.

~~In the autumn~~ the wedding of Joseph and Trudi took place at last. But it was not altogether the happy event Brigitte's marriage had been a few years ago. That had been a romantic event: invincible Franzl had been defeated and the night after the celebration Brigitte and he would belong to one another for the first time in the secluded little house in the woods. But it was common knowledge that Joseph had found his way to Trudi's room years ago. In practice marriage meant no change for them, which no doubt explained why Joseph had not been in a hurry to have the knot tied. He always declared that Trudi and he would be unable to afford children. In the end the Baron must have given a hint. The other maids were pleased at the humiliation of Trudi who once upon a time used to brag so much about her Viennese lover. During the ceremony in the church they exchanged significant glances with the villagers. Anna Krone did her best to give a festive air to the occasion: with the Baron's permission the guests were given as much beer and wine as they could stow away, and they celebrated bride and bridegroom in their songs. But throughout the evening Joseph looked glum and Trudi laughed merely in order not to cry.

At Christmas Rudi was four. He wandered through the castle with Bismark and discovered the world in his own fashion. He found out

that apart from his father Anna Krone was the most powerful being in the house, but these two great powers never clashed. There was no doubt that Anna was master of Krone, but Krone in his turn had complete sway over the horses. And Anna certainly had much authority over Mama, who had to go down every day to ask her what there would be for dinner. Besides, Anna was the only one who could give him lumps of sugar, and beans to play with.

Trudi was always too busy to attend to him but Joseph could invariably be persuaded to do a conjuring trick. Conjuring was Joseph's speciality. He put a handkerchief in his trouser leg and made Rudi pull it out from beneath his collar. He could cut off his little finger without bleeding, and make it come back. Krone took Rudi to the stables and lifted him on to the back of the horse Claudius. He led it carefully by the bit while, high up, Rudi tried to persuade it to gallop and to rear. From Klagenfurt Georg brought leaden soldiers for his son and in his free hours Krone constructed a beautiful castle which he painted in realistic colours and presented to Rudi on his fifth birthday. The delightful surprise was waiting for him under the tall Christmas tree in the dining-room where all the servants and maids from the farm came to fetch their presents. Rudi had to sing *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht* and then the castle was handed to him. The leaden soldiers attacked the castle and defended it while the Major looked on and gave tactical hints. But Rudi knew better and took no notice of them, until one day he saw his father wearing his uniform on the occasion of some official celebration. After this Rudi believed that perhaps there was some sense in his advice, and the two fought great battles with the soldiers. Georg rarely went to Klagenfurt without bringing a new box of soldiers. It would have been difficult to say which of the two enjoyed these presents most.

George had no doubt that his son would become an officer, and indeed Rudi seemed a born soldier. There was already something military about the little fellow and people on the farm were amused to see how he ordered Bismark about and how blindly the dog obeyed the word of command. The Major did not seem to think that because Rudi would inherit the farm and the property he was precluded from following a military career. He imagined that the boy's life would be much like his own. By the time his father's death called him to Maria-Licht, his years of service would be over. Georg felt that with his iron constitution he would be able to manage the estate until he was eighty. On the financial side his plans were sound. He knew by experience how hard it was to serve in a crack regiment when one has little money to spend. He hoped to secure his son against the necessity of isolating himself at an early age, and he intended to devote to this purpose the money into which Maria would come at her mother's death. The

old lady had informed him that if she lived she would settle their share upon each of the children as they reached the age of eighteen.

One day Otto sent his godson a miniature uniform of an officer of the dragoons. Rudi was allowed to wear it when he acted as page at the wedding of Eisengruber's eldest daughter to a farmer's son from the neighbourhood. With his quiet blue-grey eyes and his high childish forehead, in the fur-collared blue dolman that hung loose over the left shoulder, he looked like a young fairy prince. All the women wanted to pet him, but he seemed aware that this did not suit his military character and waved them aside with a kind of shy haughtiness.

Georg was unable any longer to delay the first ride with his son. Maria was afraid that he would begin too early and that it would lead to an accident. In her anxiety she consulted Franzl, who suggested that they should have a pony because the horse was still too tall. The Major happened not to have thought of this, and agreed at once. Next day he went to Klagenfurt with his son to see a man recommended by Franzl, who kept ponies. Before sunset a dark-brown long-haired Shetland pony stood in the stable, much to the astonishment of the other horses. A separate manger had to be made for it because it was too small to reach the one that was there. It had the comical name of *Pumpernickl*, which it belied with its long dignified tail and its proud erect head. Krone gave as much attention to this new acquisition as to all the other horses together, and certainly the long hair needed much grooming.

The Major ordered a special saddle and reins from Klagenfurt, but meanwhile Krone improvised what was needed with blankets and straps, and made Rudi ride every day in the courtyard. The saddle maker of Klagenfurt executed the order with commendable speed, and within a week it was possible for Georg to go for the first ride with his son. Everybody from the castle and the farm gathered to witness the departure. Maria looked down with trembling heart, but the confident air of her husband, who did not lose sight of the little horseman for one moment, reassured her. Even she could not fail to notice how perfectly erect Rudi sat his pony. With the eye of a connoisseur as well as with boundless paternal pride Georg saw that the little horseman was quite at ease. He nodded to his wife as though to tell her not to worry. She waved back a little nervously and lifted up Elisabeth who also wanted to see. There they went! The pony tripped perkily by the side of the Trakehner horse. Rudi looked red with excitement at the thought of the ride through the woods. They disappeared through the gate.

In the course of a few weeks the daily ride of father and son became a habit of which nobody took special notice. It is true that the labourers

in the field still looked up from their work to follow the uneven couple with an amused smile. On the first few occasions Bismark had been locked up, howling with distress at this great injustice, but now he was allowed to accompany them and nosed out young rabbits and pheasants among the trees. Sometimes he refused to obey when he was called. Georg said he would not take the dog if it behaved like this, but Rudi gave Bismark a good talking to, and after this he came to heel as soon as his young master called.

This was the realization of Georg's long dream. "Look Rudi, these are the nine-year-old pines! They had been there for three years when you came into the world . . . They're sowing the winter wheat there . . . We've planted beets over here; that's for when the cattle are still in the stable . . . Those posts mark the end of our land. Do you realize that one day all this will belong to you?"

To speak the honest truth Rudi did not realize it. He could understand that Bismark was his dog and Pumpernickl his pony, but he could not grasp that this soil would be his one day. Nor did it interest him. What was the soil? Surely, it belonged to the trees and to the corn. If this wood was to be his later, would the rabbits, the deer, the foxes, the squirrels also belong to him? Surely, this could not be true! If one caught a rabbit with one's own hands it belonged to one: that was fair. And if Bismark caught a rabbit, well, then it was Bismark's rabbit. But the Major put his heavy hand on the shoulder of his boy and said: "Listen, Rudi. To own the land means that one has to take care of it. We've got to see to it that it is sown and harvested. When later I shall no longer be there, you'll have to look after all these things, and also after the castle and the farm and all the people who work here."

Oh, he would have to look after things! It all became a little clearer.

"Look," said Georg, "there's a ditch. Dare you jump it?"

Rudi had noticed the ditch quite a while ago, and the question of daring to jump had not even presented itself to his mind. There was the ditch, so what else could one do but jump it? He took the obstacle with natural ease, turned round in the saddle, and looked at his father with a laugh. The father had observed the faultless jump and followed him silently.

When Elisabeth reached the age of five there was a pony on her list of wishes. Which was only fair, for she could hold herself very straight in Pumpernickl's saddle. Georg bought a second pony, and that summer the three of them went out for the first time. Georg and Rudi took Elisabeth between them, and Bismark, indifferent to the fact that the Iron Chancellor, after whom he was named, was on his deathbed at Friedrichsruhe, ran ahead of them. Elisabeth looked

very much like her elder brother. They both had something remarkably quiet and self-possessed about them. They felt equals in all things and understood one another with a glance. Stephan and Angélique were of a very different make. They had the aristocratic paleness, the nervousness and the more delicate figure of their mother. As they had to stay at home while Rudi and Elisabeth went out with Papa, they formed a close alliance and lived their own adventures.

Stephan was the leading spirit; his large, bright, brown eyes burned with the fire of inspiration. Trudi said that his eyes frightened her and the other maids thought that one day, with his dark hair over those eyes that looked at one so strangely, he would grow into a dangerously pretty boy. Angélique admired her twin brother and followed him everywhere.

During this one summer they caused more anxiety to Maria than Rudi and Elisabeth ever did. Everybody in the castle grew used to the notion that an eye had to be kept on them, but they continually eluded this collective supervision. The voice of the invisible clock in the tower puzzled Stephan, and at last he decided to investigate the matter with Angélique. They crept up the steep worn-out stone staircase. Stephan went ahead and when they heard voices calling from the courtyard below Stephan said: "Keep quiet! Otherwise they'll find us!" Angélique stayed motionless as they sat side by side in the half-dark. Somewhere above them the mysterious voice of the clock must be living. The anxious cries from downstairs filled Stephan with delight: "They don't know where we've gone to. They think we'll never return! And perhaps they'll lock the door downstairs, and then we'll never be able to get out any more!" Angélique shuddered and crept even closer to her brother. There was another breathless wait, till Toni Eisengruber came up the stairs and discovered the lost ones. Toni always knew where to find them. Whenever the twins disappeared he was called at once and as soon as he joined the search the others felt a little less anxious.

Now it was necessary to lock up the tower like all the other empty rooms on the top floor. Maria sent for a carpenter who placed bars on some of the windows, in particular those of the nursery, because on these bright summer mornings the children climbed out of bed before anybody arrived to look after them. Stephan and his little sister were greatly interested in the carpenter's work. He dragged one leg and Stephan asked him whether this was because he had fallen through a window for which they had made no bars. The carpenter thought it was meant as a joke and laughed. He did not realize that the child was serious and that on its face could be seen already the traces of an anxious desire to understand the life other people led.

Elisabeth mothered the two youngest children. If in the morning

Trudi was a little late, she washed Stephan and sternly ordered him back if he tried to escape. He didn't like washing at all and Angélique was hardly better. Elisabeth thought this very strange because she liked to look fresh and to have clean clothes.

Stephan himself felt that this passive resistance against his sister's authority was very wicked, but Angélique resisted with conviction. She was furious when Elisabeth sounded severe in calling Stephan back to a sense of duty. In a blind rage she took her twin brother's part, scratched, kicked and bit Elisabeth, who went pale with distress and allowed Stephan to go. But on one occasion she felt that she could not give way. There was an old disused well outside the castle, covered with a grid that was kept in position by an iron bar and a padlock. One day during harvest time as he passed along on a cart Stephan discovered the well. Some time afterwards he escaped through the gate with Angélique and climbed on top of it. Through the grid he could look at the glimmering black water deep down below. It was fascinating and mysterious, and when he shouted a voice from below answered him. "Is it the frog in Anna Krone's story about the bewitched prince?" asked Angélique in a whisper. It was a frightening thought, but at the same time it had something familiar, for they knew the frog very well. "Is that you, frog?" Stephan shouted while he tried to move the iron bar. This was not difficult as the padlock was eaten away with rust. But the grid proved too heavy, and Stephan decided to call Rudi to his assistance. Rudi was so strong that he could lift anything he wanted. Then Stephan would let himself down by the chain while Rudi held the other end of it. Once he was down Stephan would ask the frog whether the prince wanted to get out of the well. It would be a risky adventure, but it had to be accomplished. Stephan told Angélique what he was going to do. She said she would never be brave enough to do such a thing.

When Rudi was told of Stephan's plan he was astounded and rather frightened. But it was presented with such persuasive conviction that his seven year old mind soon caught fire also. His share would be very honourable, and as he was to hold the chain there could be no risk. Stephan was so light that he could easily lift him, and besides the chain was made of iron. Of course Rudi did not believe the nonsense about the frog with a golden ball in its mouth. But the adventure was attractively sensational.

"Have you told Elisabeth?" he asked.

"She mustn't know: she would tell," said Angélique. Rudi was not so sure of this. "If I tell her she won't sneak," he declared full of confidence, and although Angélique protested he went at once to Elisabeth. While he told her the plan it began to look silly, and he couldn't help laughing at it. What a funny boy Stephan was when

one came to think of it! He always had such queer schemes. But of course there was no danger, as he was going to hold the chain himself.

Elisabeth said nothing. Her eyes grew big and angry, and suddenly she ran away in the direction of the house. "What are you doing?" Rudi asked suspiciously. "You're not going to sneak, are you?" She did not look round. The contemptuous word hurt her, and she ducked her head to receive it. She hurried up to the music-room where Mama was playing the piano. Rudi went back rather awkwardly to Stephan whom he had unintentionally given away. Angélique nodded with bitter satisfaction: she had known all the time what would happen. Inside the piano suddenly was silent, and a moment afterwards Papa appeared.

Georg knew exactly how to deal with his youngest son on this occasion, although what Elisabeth had just told him sent a cold shiver down his back: "Come along, young man; show me that well," he said to the boy. Pale and nervous, Elisabeth accompanied them, while Angélique looked daggers at her. Stephan was feeling like a great tragic hero. "Well," said Georg when they reached the well, "so you want to look down there, do you? Hold him firmly, Rudi."

Rudi got hold of his little brother. He could not imagine any circumstance in which he would not have blindly obeyed his father. Meanwhile Stephan was wondering with awe what was going to happen. With one tug the Major pulled away the iron bar, seized the heavy grid with both hands, and placed it by the side of the well. No longer muzzled, the well became a threatening dark mouth in the grey dusk of the late September afternoon.

"Now then, you come along here."

Stephan turned terribly pale and a wild look of fear came in his eyes. Angélique shrieked and put her arms round her father's legs.

"You wanted to get inside, didn't you?" said Georg, and there was something hoarse and frightening in his voice. With chattering teeth Stephan nodded "No." Thereupon Georg put him down, placed the grid on the well and fixed the iron bar over it. "Come along then," he said. "Let's go home."

Stephan never said another word about the well. For days afterwards his initiative seemed paralysed. Angélique consoled him, stayed with him more than ever, and said nasty things about Elisabeth. But Stephan received them without comment. Elisabeth washed him as usual, and got hold of Angélique every morning. She pretended not to mind her opposition but it pained her very much. She was no sneak, although Angélique said so.

What hurt her most was that Rudi also seemed to consider her a sneak. He saw her crying, put his arm round her, and asked what was the matter. She could not tell him; he knew quite well. "Then I

shouldn't worry any more," said Rudi magnanimously. But in his heart he remained convinced of her guilt.

Rudi and Elisabeth had already been taught reading and writing by Maria, and Father Aigner's weekly catechism lessons were supplemented by her with stories about the miracles of Jesus and the Saints. Rudi had already reached the age when he went to confession. He had no difficulties about it. He faithfully learned his catechism lessons, but he looked upon them as something one was expected to know. He did not feel that all these things had really happened. The change of the water into wine at the wedding of Cana impressed him rather as a highly successful conjuring trick. Stephan's reaction was very different. The biblical stories fired his imagination. He felt a missionary enthusiasm glowing in him. He was ready to protect the Lord Jesus and to avenge his wrongs. He wanted to go and fight the wicked men of Golgotha with his sword. When Maria told her stories he was entirely absorbed in this dramatic world. He went through the incidents again at night before he fell asleep and his evening prayer was like a vow made to the Lord: "You may count on me, I am your soldier."

Georg called him: "Our little crusader," since in the procession of the Assumption of the Virgin, Stephan walked with buckler and sword beneath the banner of Godfrey of Bouillon, who was represented by Rudi. Stephan continued in this part for many days. He inherited his easily fired imagination, with his unaccountable temperament, from his mother. Stephan was her boy, Rudi was Georg's.

"Stephan belongs to me." This is how Maria felt it. When she told him a story he became excited and entered into it completely. She often discussed the boy with Father Aigner. The priest placed his hand on the child's head, looked into his large dark ecstatic eyes and said: "You needn't be surprised if he becomes a priest one day."—"My husband would never consent to that," said Maria.

"But he could not prevent it if the boy had it in him," was Father Aigner's opinion. He laughed. "We can leave it to time."

No doubt there was still plenty of time, but Maria was already preoccupied by the thought that her son might one day be a priest. She could not help making a guarded remark on the subject one day. "Do you know that Stephan wants to become a priest?" she asked Georg laughingly. "He has told Father Aigner."

"Does Stephan want it or do you?" asked Georg without looking up from his newspaper.

Maria was hurt. "I should never think of compelling him to do a thing he might not choose to do of his own free will."

Georg remained silent. He was not particularly keen on the clergy, though he was ready to make an exception for Father Aigner. He did

not believe that there could be an inner vocation in a child and he was rather inclined to attribute such things to the exaltation of mothers who wanted their sons to preserve their purity inside the white walls of a monastery, and who did not dare send them out into the world of chaos and strife. Chaos and strife, yes, but the place for a man. Last time he was in Vienna he heard that his brother Egon's son Joachim had entered a Seminary and wanted to become a Jesuit. Just what would happen to Egon, he thought with amusement.

"I can't help it. I can always feel his fervour when I talk about religion to Stephan," said Maria in an attempt to defend herself.

"Tell him stories of robbers, and you'll feel that he is a passionate robber!"

Maria remembered the incident that made him say this. One day they both entered the library unexpectedly and they found Stephan executing a wild warrior's dance with Georg's sabre which he had taken from the wall. His brother and his two sisters formed his public. He waved the large weapon round his head with the frenzy of a dervish, while his eyes were rolling wildly and he made passes at invisible enemies.

Was Georg right perhaps? Did she merely see in her son what she wanted to see in him? Perhaps she was attempting to sow in him something she would afterwards imagine had been there all the time. She decided to avoid this mistake in future. But she was unable herself to resist the religious emotion that was mastering her with the approach of Christmas. It was stronger than her own determination. The stories of the manger in Bethlehem, of the shepherds and the star that guided the kings from the East, had their consummation for her when she saw them reflected in the enthusiastic eyes of her child. She herself was all aglow then and lost herself with Stephan in this world that was so infinitely concrete and full of meaning, where God's word resounded mightily and sin was visited with fire and flood. Was it wrong then to implant the belief in this universe in her son and to make him strong and invulnerable against the storms he would have to withstand in the accidental and narrow world into which he happened to be born? Was she not giving him the best gift she had to bestow? And was it her right to withhold it from him, when his silent eyes were asking for it?

Her husband saw what was happening and decided to defend him in his own manner. In the spring he bought a third pony which soon effected what he wanted. Stephan no longer asked his mother to tell biblical stories. He sat on his dappled pony Rubezahl and taught his twin sister how to keep in the saddle.

To save the expense of a fourth pony Georg granted Rudi his wish to ride a big horse. For the time being, however, Claudius was not suited to the purpose; nor would the stallion do that had been born

two summers ago. He chose Sultane for her thorough reliability. Georg could not repress a proud smile when his complete cavalcade accompanied by the dog rode out for the first time. It was his hour of triumph. Now that all his children could ride on horseback they belonged to him. Maria could not at once believe that this had happened. Stephan had always been her own boy. And he had not yet forgotten this. It was to her he came first to show himself when he inherited the cavalry uniform which Rudi had grown out of. When Rudi used to wear this faithful miniature copy of a uniform he had something radiant and invulnerable as though he were the eternally youthful genius of war. But when Stephan unexpectedly stood before her, drawing the shining helmet over his large dark eyes with a hand that trembled with excitement, she suddenly felt something tragic and fateful about the little toy soldier. She turned pale and protested with both hands: "Don't, Stephan, don't!"

Spring brought another cruel disappointment to Maria: Father Aigner was appointed parish priest at Sankt Nikolai near the lake of Ossiach. It was not very far away, but too far for him to come and celebrate Mass at the castle. His lessons also came to an end. Georg was genuinely sorry because of Maria's loss and he did not deserve her remark: "Well, now you have everything as you wanted it!" Georg replied that at any rate he could assure her that he had used no influence to secure Father Aigner's promotion.

The place of the departing friend was taken by a young assistant parish priest fresh from the seminary and full of pretensions. He was a young man who continually irritated his old chief and just the kind of "black frock" who confirmed Georg in his dislike of the priesthood. Naturally the new assistant took over the task of his predecessor and came once a month to Maria-Licht to celebrate Mass and to prepare the children for communion. But Maria kept aloof from this new shepherd and it was necessary to exercise considerable pressure upon the staff before they could be made to attend in the chapel on Sunday.

Maria felt completely defeated and sought compensation in the reading and arithmetic lessons all the children were by now attending. Rudi and Elisabeth assisted her with the two younger ones. It was like a little school. The afternoons were devoted to work. In the morning Georg rode out at the head of his four children unless rain kept them at home.

While Stephan was the darling of his mother and of all the women in the castle, Rudi possessed the heart of his father. Georg handed him a small-sized sabre and taught him parries and feints and the four positions of the wrist. Then he explained to him the composition of an army corps, and why cavalry can be used for the offensive only. He told him of the threatening Boer War and of the liberation of

Khartoum by Kitchener's troops after they had walked across the corpses of tens of thousands of dervishes. For Rudi's sake he fetched down his handbook of tactics and taught the boy to draw up his soldiers in scientific formation. He also explained to him the modern battle line and showed the position in which the batteries had to be placed. Georg caught himself dreaming of a day when he would sleep under canvas with his son by his side. What a curious romantic notion! Ten years ago when he left the army and came to Maria-Licht to till his fields he wanted nothing except peace for himself, for his property, and for the whole world. And here he was now with all the illusions of the cadet school.

Rudi listened with shining eyes to his father's story of the cavalry charge at Custoza for which he and his comrades had been decorated. How long could the whole affair have lasted? Certainly not more than a quarter of an hour. But for the sake of this one quarter of an hour it had been worth while being a cavalry officer and living through many years of monotonous garrison life. Together with the Huzzars and the Uhlans, the Dragoons ventured this reckless attack at the beginning of the battle. Life had never seemed too beautiful and so desirable as when they drew up their lines to throw their lives into the scales for the sake of Austria and of their Emperor. With lance and with sword they galloped in pursuit of Death, trying to seize him by the cloak and to fight him in single combat, although each one of them knew that he who once looked into Death's eyes was lost and sank from the saddle. What did it matter? Possibly one was already mortally wounded without knowing it. One felt no pain, one felt only how the blood rushed through one's youthful heart, one lived and felt the living, sweating body of the horse between one's knees. One did not hate the enemy, one felt grateful if the enemy showed fight. One would have been ready to embrace him after pushing one's lance through his breast. They were surrounded with a thick cloud of dust through which the sun shone on swords and on helmets. They jumped across the bodies of horses writhing on the ground. They knew that their friends were around them and shouted with sheer enjoyment and jubilation. The horses felt like their riders and rushed on into the rain of death. It would have been impossible to hold them back. A few moments and all was over. The enemy line was broken. The aim had been achieved. And now they had to make their way back unscathed through the squares hastily formed by a few hundred Bersaglieri firing upon them. But first they compelled an enemy battery hurrying in flight to turn round and to move towards the Austrian lines. In reward for this game they had played with cheeks glowing with excitement the Archduke and Field-Marshal called them "heroes." But while they were looking for further laurels there came news that at Königgratz luck had been on the side of the Prussians,

or rather on the side of their modern breech-loading rifles which mowed down the valiant Austrian troops. And notwithstanding the splendid victory of Custozza, Austria lost the war.

After this glowing tale Rudi knew only one desire: to ride in a cavalry charge by his father's side! He told him so and the Major looked at his boy with a strange emotion. "Yes, that would have been great!" But at the same time he vaguely realized that they were both talking like children.

In the summer Rudi tried to take a difficult jump, and Sultane landed badly. She had to be led home by the bridle limping terribly. The mare was placed in the stable and covered with woollen blankets, but in the evening she had a high fever and shivered continually. The veterinary surgeon was summoned but did not feel like coming to Maria-Licht so late at night. He gave Krone a bottle of medicine which, he said, would cause the fever to subside. When he arrived the following morning he could only confirm what Georg had suspected from the beginning. The right shoulder was dislocated and the horse would have to be killed. If the Baron thought it too painful to do it himself the vet offered to do it for him.

Georg went very pale but declined the offer. He said that the horse was entitled to be destroyed by its own master. The veterinary surgeon, who had expected no other reply, mounted his own horse and rode away. Georg turned slowly round and looked at his eldest. He would have preferred the boy not to be present. "Is it quite impossible for Sultane to recover, father?" Rudi asked in a whisper, as though the horse might have understood him.

"Yes, Rudi. And we must save her unnecessary suffering."

Rudi drew a deep breath. He understood. "And, when are you going to do it?"

"At once," said the Major with something hard in his voice. "I am going to get my revolver. Don't tell Mama or any of the others. Go and join them till I'm back."

"Can't I stay, Papa?"—"Do you want to?" asked the Major a little uncertainly.

"She was my horse after all, and I made her take that jump."

Georg placed his hand on his son's shoulder. He wanted to say something, perhaps to give him a word of advice. But he changed his mind. "All right, you stay."

Krone was very upset. He was not sure whether the Baron would need him. He took refuge in Anna's kitchen and would have waited with his hands over his ears till the shot had fallen. But Anna sent him back. "Are you a man!" she said reproachfully. But she wanted to cry herself.

Accompanied by Rudi and Krone Georg led the horse to the back

of the farm. He asked Eisengruber to harness a cart on which he intended to take the corpse into the wood in order to have it buried. Then he cocked his revolver.

"Dare you hold her by the bit?" he asked Rudi.

Rudi was ash-coloured as he nodded yes. Eisengruber looked at him with concern. He was afraid the boy would faint before the shot went off. But Rudi took hold of Sultane's bit and placed his hand gently and soothingly on her hot dry nose. The mare looked frightened. She was obviously in great pain. The brief walk to the farm had been a terrible effort for her. And she felt that something unusual was happening. At the touch of the cold barrel of the revolver against her forehead she opened her large moist eyes with their beautifully contrasted black and white. For the sake of Rudi Georg hurried. The shot cracked sharply. The animal kicked its hind legs fiercely. The Major and Eisengruber caught hold of it at the same time but Rudi did not let go. When the mare fell, he sank down by her side. Sultane gave one more kick and then pushed out her feet with a stiff shudder. She tried to lift her head but Rudi had fainted with his cheek against her.

Eisengruber picked the boy up. "Bring me some water!" he shouted in the direction of the farm. The water was needed not only to bring the boy round but also to wash away the blood from his neck. He allowed himself to be helped rather unwillingly. He was ashamed at his weakness. He stayed with the men while they lifted the body of the mare on to the cart. As they did this the horse's bowels emptied and Rudi looked with a vague horror at this first picture of death that was displayed before him. Sultane no longer showed her usual features: her mouth was open and from between her bare teeth her thick grey tongue protruded unpleasantly.

"Come along now," said Georg. Rudi walked by his side looking in the distance with big sad eyes. When he thought of the cavalry charge, which only yesterday appeared to him as the finest thing in the world, he saw nothing but dead horses with their tongues hanging disgustingly between their teeth and their rigid legs sticking out.

The previous summer Georg went swimming in the lake with Rudi and Elisabeth whenever it was warm enough. This year he took the four children with him. Rudi had learned to dive, and was able to swim with his father to the little island in the midst of the lake. Elisabeth was in no hurry and devoted most of her time to Stephan and Angélique who had still to learn to kick their arms and legs in the right manner. As the twins were so little inclined to discipline, the Major organized the day of the children with a military precision to which they were held most severely. Their life was run according to a conception of personal responsibility. Rudi was made responsible

for Stephan and Elisabeth for Angélique. They all had to appear at breakfast at seven o'clock with clean shoes and their hair combed. When on the stroke of seven he entered the dining-room, he expected to find them all in their places. It was unnecessary to inspect Rudi and Elisabeth, but the twins had to be kept under close control. If Stephan's nails were black he was sent upstairs with Rudi, which was a humiliation indeed. As Maria stayed in bed in order not to be too tired later in the day, Georg was alone with the children at breakfast. When it was over they went to the stables where they groomed and saddled their horses for the next half-hour. Rudi was at last riding the stallion Claudius who had been intended for him. Kalmuk was beginning to show a certain nervousness due to old age. Perhaps he was upset by the loss of Sultane who had for so many years been his stable-companion. At harvest time the children were allowed to help on the land. They drank must with the farm-hands and the maids, and ate thick slices of bread. Toni, sixteen years old and as strong as an adult, was home on holiday from the agricultural school at Klagenfurt. He looked a little after Stephan who was always somewhat unaccountable and might easily have jumped off a loaded cart, just when the men lifted the sheaves on their sharp forks. Toni was a good friend to all of them. He always knew the place where the thickest brambles and the wild strawberries were to be found. What a pity he was only there during the school holidays! Was it really necessary to learn so much before one could be a farmer?

One day Papa suggested that they should go and see Father Aigner at Sankt Nikolai on the following Sunday. "Hurray!" shouted the children. They rode for two hours through woods and along fields and reached the village just when the bell in the small tower rang for High Mass. They entered the church under the surprised eyes of the villagers, who were not used to visitors. Father Aigner must have noticed them in the midst of his small congregation, but his face bore no trace of recognition. After the service however he received them in the sacristy with open arms. He invited all five of them to stay to lunch. "You'll have to do some conjuring" he told his housekeeper, and apparently she did, for the fare was ample. In the afternoon, after the horses had had a good rest, they rode back so as to be home before dark.

"What a splendid foursome!" Father Aigner said to the Major when they were taking leave. This was just what Georg had intended to make out of his children: a splendid foursome! If they stuck together through life, he told them, life would not harm them. The only occasions when his children saw him angry were when they squabbled or teased one another. On such occasions he punished them heavily and punished the four of them.

In order to give symbolic expression to the harmony he wanted to

reign between them Georg decided to get them to play music together. Maria told him one day that Stephen was musical; he sang so prettily to her accompaniment and was able to extract many tunes from Krone's defective harmonica. Georg said nothing, but went upstairs where his old books were kept in piles, and came down with a violin. To Maria's surprise he admitted that when he was at the cadet school he used to play it. He was able therefore to teach the first rudiments to his children, who wanted at once to try the instrument. And as he noticed their enthusiasm Georg suddenly thought: "What about a quartet?" The word pleased him so much that he made use of it at once. Why should his children, who had Hungarian blood in their veins, not be able to play some string instrument and play it well? He began by getting the necessary instruments on hire, in expectation of the day when each child would ask for one of his own. He did not waste much time in distributing the parts. Rudi was to play the 'cello, Elisabeth the viola, Stephen and Angélique the first and second violin. The children were happy, and the introductory lessons were a delight. Then came the first hesitant strokes on the chords. The violin teacher struck a broad chord on the piano while all the four of them gave an "A." If one of them had done it by himself it might not have sounded very fine, but coming from four instruments at once it seemed very good indeed. It was not possible to get a special 'cello player to teach Rudi, but Georg put him down with the 'cello between his knees and said: "Look, that's how you hold the bow. Move it to and fro without pressing and keep the wrist loose." The violin teacher looked on and nodded with amused approval. Rudi learned the various positions of the left hand from a book the Major brought from Klagenfurt. The first reward of their zeal was that they were able to perform *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht* in four parts at Christmas. It was a surprise for Georg, who had a strange feeling in his throat when, a little uncertain still and supported by Maria at the piano, the old familiar Christmas song sounded through the room with its lighted Christmas tree. Yes, this was how he had visualized his quartet.

On New Year's Eve he addressed the children. "To-morrow, my children, not only a New Year, but a new century begins. The twentieth-century! Rudi and Elisabeth know how much a century is. I say this for Stephan and Angélique: it is one hundred years, or more than any human being can live. Look at your father. He is fifty-eight and nearly grey. So you can see that I shan't live a whole century. Yes, and that is just what I wanted to say: One day I shan't be there any longer, nor Mama perhaps. Then the four of you will stand alone in the world, and it will be necessary for you to stick together, to help one another in everything and never to leave one another in the lurch. Your father has always been by himself, although

he has a brother, Uncle Egon, whom you only know by name. See to it that you are wiser. . . ."

He kissed them all on the forehead and sent them upstairs to Maria. In the evening the children were allowed to stay up late and to go and look at the fire that was being lit behind the farm. Stephan was unable to fall asleep afterwards. He crept into the bed of his elder sister to warm his ice-cold feet and promised that later he would always stay with her. "But also with Angélique and Rudi, won't you?" Elisabeth asked him very earnestly. "Oh, yes, of course, with all of you."

Maria proved to be right: Stephan was undoubtedly musical. After a short while he played much better than any of the others. His manner of putting his violin on his shoulder and placing his cheek on it seemed to be innate. In the kitchen Anna Krone and the others often asked him to perform. He played the *Radetzky March* and the *Blue Danube*, and also anything he heard Maria play on the piano. He waited impatiently for the arrival of the Slovene reapers in the summer. He would play for them while they sang. He played like a real gypsy without worrying much about notes. Rudi and Elisabeth accused him of not keeping time, but he answered that they ought to follow him. "Listen, this is how it should be!"—"No, that's not how it should be, little fellow," said Rudi with the authority of the eldest, "look what's written here. This *forte* lasts two and a half beats, in my opinion." Stephan refused to look at the page and became white with rage: "I shan't play with you people at all!"

Stephan was irascible at all times, but once he held his violin in his hands his temper was impossible. Then the best thing was to give him his head. And so, very soon, he was the leader of the quartet, which was right after all since he played first fiddle.

Every spring Uncle Otto sent a parcel of toys from Vienna. This year he surprised Rudi with a real cavalry trumpet. Papa taught him to blow a number of signals on it. This made them think of playing soldiers, a game they had rather forgotten as a result of their musical studies. Stephan remembered his cavalry uniform, and took it to Anna to have it mended. Krone, who had an almost sentimental affection for Stephan, repaired the helmet that had become rather dented and replaced his broken sabre with a sturdy wooden sword. Thus equipped, Stephan declared that he was ready to defend the castle against all comers. Franzl, the eldest son of the forester Franz, happened to have been asked whether he could bring his five-year old little brother for a game one day. Toni Eisengruber was home for the Easter vacation and Elisabeth, who was always able to get him to do whatever she liked, went to ask him to join in the game. But he had to

help his father bring home a cart-load of firewood. It was a pity, because Toni would have done so well as Captain of the besieging force. So Rudi had to take command and at the same time to blow the signal for the charge.

Stephan's defence consisted in hiding till he was discovered and made a prisoner. Of course he had a right to escape if he could. Bismark was not allowed to be a soldier because he would have found his way at once to the besieged garrison. Rudi blew the charge and with loud huzzas the besiegers stormed the castle. They first searched the stables and the coach-house, and then the kitchen. They threatened Anna Krone at the point of the sword, to know whether she was hiding Stephan. But she swore her innocence upon her honour and conciliated the soldiery by inviting them all to the kitchen after the battle was over. She revealed that, hidden in the cupboard, were some provisions for the troops.

"Where can he be?" wondered Angélique. In her desire always to be leader she did so want to be the first to discover him. "The bedroom!" Elisabeth suggested. And she proved to be right. As they entered the enemy escaped into the gallery from underneath Mama's bed. "Surround him!" ordered Rudi, just as Stephan rushed into the dining-room. Angélique and Franzl each ran towards one of the other entrances, and Stephan was hemmed in. He stood on top of the long dining-room table, his sword drawn, ready to jump down in order to escape either round the table or underneath it.

"Stephan!" shouted Angélique, glad to have found him. She wanted to be the first whose voice he should hear. She ran towards him with a laugh, but at this moment even his twin sister was an enemy like the others. He panted with excitement and his eyes shone bright under the helmet. "Come along if you dare!" he cried in a challenging voice, and at the same time he jumped off the table. They all threw themselves upon him, but he slipped away. The children rushed round the table in both direction and ran against one another. "Wrong!" cried Stephan, running towards the door which he thought was free. But just then the Major, who wanted to make sure that the dining-room was not being demolished, made his appearance through that door. Papa could not be considered an enemy, but all the same Stephan rushed back, sought another way . . .

"Stephan!" shrieked Elisabeth, suddenly sick with terror.

"Come here!" thundered the Major. "Come down from that window-ledge!" Stephan gazed at both of them with astonishment and hesitation. He did not seem to realize what they wanted him to do. He tried to look round into the depth behind him. Angélique rushed in his direction with open arms. He laughed as he lifted his sword to defend himself. But at the same time he felt himself swaying. He tried to catch hold of the side of the window with his hand but

his fingers slipped along it. Elisabeth covered her face with her sleeve. Rudi dropped the brass trumpet from his hands. Angélique looked out and gave a piercing shriek.

When Georg had gone the few paces that separated him from the window he saw his little boy lying motionless in the dry moat, his face among the nettles.

"Don't tell Mama!" he was able to shout as he rushed down. The children stood trembling in a heap by the window. Elisabeth was moaning softly.

They saw how, on the path that ran along the moat, a cart loaded with wood stood still, and how Toni Eisengruber jumped down from it and dropped into the ditch. They saw him bend over Stephan and lift him in his arms. Then he looked up to see if any one was looking down from the windows. Stephan's head with the sleek dark hair was hanging limp over Toni's arm. There came Papa, running bare-headed along the path. Toni handed the child to him.

When there was nothing more to be seen the children awoke from their nightmare, and looked at each other with panic-stricken eyes. What could they do? Elisabeth ran out to meet Papa. Rudi followed her, but first he picked up his trumpet from the floor. The brass felt chill and unpleasant to his touch. Angélique was nowhere to be seen. Later she was found by Toni Eisengruber, hidden in one of the dark attics. The Major carried his youngest son to his wife. He showed no external wounds and his pulse was still beating, though feebly. Maria did not faint, as Georg feared she would. Her hands trembled, but with these trembling hands she was able to undress the little boy while Elisabeth went to fetch water and a towel. Toni had already gone to Krone who harnessed his horses and went for the doctor.

When Dr. Prisswitz arrived at the castle, Maria sat gazing at her dead child. During the long wait Georg paced softly up and down the room, addressing a word now and then to his wife who did not hear him. From time to time he looked at the bluish-white and motionless face of Stephan, with the lamp shining on it. Dr. Prisswitz discovered a number of internal wounds. He tried to speak a word of consolation to Maria.

It was only towards morning that Rudi and Elisabeth fell asleep in each other's arms. Mama had taken Angélique with her. Downstairs in the kitchen and on the farm the lights kept burning till dawn.

Peacefully, with a touch of surprise upon his little face, Stephan was at rest in the midst of all this distress. His father spent half the night with him, and the other half with his wife, who stared silently at the ceiling. It was not granted to Georg to be able to think of his own grief. For the time being Maria was his first concern.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WINDOW.

"Now God has taken him all the same." These were the first words that passed Maria's lips after long days of frightening silence. It was meant as a reproach to her husband, because once he laughed at her when she wanted to devote her little Stephan to the service of God. Georg thought the reproach unreasonable, and preferred not to answer it. He was only too glad to hear her voice once more. Anything rather than the distressing silence that had wrought upon his nerves for so many days.

He tried to spare her feelings by taking all necessary measures without consulting her. He sent a message to Father Aigner asking him to come over for the funeral. He hoped so much that Maria would melt when she heard the toll of the little bell while the village children in their Sunday-best carried the small coffin out of the castle into the wood where the birds were singing. The small grave was completely buried under the flowers. For one moment it seemed as though Stephan were not dead, but continued to live in the children who stood around and in the whole of nature. It had been impossible to persuade Maria to go to the churchyard. Throughout the ceremony he felt anxious about her, although Anna Krone stayed behind and promised not to lose sight of her for a second. He had to follow his little son like a widower between his three children.

He had imagined that on that night, when for the first time Stephan was lying outside beneath the earth and the falling rain, Maria would take refuge in his arms. But she turned away from him. Within a few weeks she had her first grey hair. She could not bring herself to swallow one bite: her usual place at the table was just opposite the fatal window.

Georg removed everything that could have reminded her of her son. He took the boy's violin upstairs and put it with his books where he had found it a year before. He placed the cavalry uniform in which he died in a drawer of which he put the key in his pocket. Anna Krone and Trudi carried Stephan's bed, his clothes, and his toys to the attic. But it was impossible to hide the window in the dining-room.

He regularly visited the churchyard with his children and placed fresh flowers on the grave. He told this to Maria and she listened with queerly raised eyebrows and pinched lips. "Wouldn't you like to go with us to-morrow, Maria?" She shook her head and ran up to her

room. Rudi and Elisabeth tried to console her. She took their hands in a gesture of silent gratitude, but she was unable to utter a word.

Georg asked Father Aigner to come and talk to Maria, and at last the priest persuaded her to visit the grave. With her husband and the old friend she went to the churchyard and placed flowers on the grave, murmuring the boy's name in the midst of her sobs. She spent the whole evening in the chapel, and when it was after midnight Georg found her there asleep in her pew. "I've seen him," she murmured while Georg conducted her to bed. "I've talked with him! I'll go to the chapel again to-morrow. He must forgive me because I went away from him once, when he was still very, very small. Do you remember?"

Georg sighed. If this continued he would soon bury his wife also. When he realized the danger he acted with characteristic determination. First of all he put an end to the daily scene at breakfast when little Angélique, following her mother's example, tried to leave her plate untouched. Then he went up to Maria's room and said, "Listen, I demand that you shall take some food."

She looked at him then as though she woke out of a dream. "Do you imagine you'll be able to force me?"

"Yes. I'm going to force you to realize that you have three children left, for whom you've as much responsibility as I have. You thought you had to beg Stephan's pardon for having once left him for a month. See to it that you won't have to beg the forgiveness of your other children when it is too late."

At first she tried to look at him with proud aloofness. But already he could read the first signs of uncertainty. He had broken her pride, and unexpectedly her voice had a very humble sound: "How are the other children?"

"I can't answer that yet, because I've been too much concerned with you. This morning Angélique refused to eat, because you won't."

Maria slowly drew near him. He caught her in his arms and as she hid her head on his shoulder he took a deep breath. "Georg," she sobbed softly. He, too, was unable to master his tears. "You're broken because of Stephan," he said. "Of course I know. But you're not the only one who's unhappy."

She silently admitted her wrong. After a minute she came to a decision: "Right, I shall try to eat. But you don't mind if I ask Trudi to bring my food here? I promise . . ."

"No, Maria. I don't want only to get you to eat, but that you should again sit down at table among our children."

"I can't Georg, I can't!"—"I demand it!" She looked at him frightened and lost.

"And then I'll let you go to the chapel to-night, and you can stay until I come to fetch you." She gave no reply but ventured no further attempt to escape his will. She obeyed passively as though he had

hypnotized her. The following Sunday she went to Mass with him and the children and afterwards she visited the churchyard. A small stone had been placed on the grave.

On the day after the funeral Georg resumed the rides with his children. Stephan's pony Rubezahl neighed miserably because nobody came to saddle it. Georg hesitated a moment and told Rudi to ride the pony. He took Rudi's place on Claudius. Kalmuk did not mind being left in the stable. Bismark, who ever since the accident had wandered desolately through the house, jumped around them, barking with delight. But this first expedition without Stephan was dreadfully painful to Georg and to the children. Elisabeth kept to her father's side and Rudi took pity on Angélique. Their two ponies were used to riding stirrup to stirrup. The labourers in the field continued to work with bowed heads, their backs turned to them. It was only after the little procession had passed that they shyly looked up. What they saw seemed to them as cruel as a mutilated hand.

The children did not know what to talk about. None of them could banish Stephan from his thoughts, yet no one ventured to mention his name. Through his unspoken grief Georg sensed theirs. In his loneliness this was almost a consolation. What more could he wish for than that they should all share the common sorrow for Stephan? Even now he was immeasurably rich.

He knew that the only way to liberate the young hearts of these children was to break their silence concerning Stephan. They came to a clearing in the wood. He stopped and gathered the three around him. Then he looked up and said with great simplicity: "Here Stephan must be able to see us from Heaven."

Amazed, the children looked up from their saddles, into the blue spring sky over which drifted a few attenuated white clouds. The silence around them was broken by the clear song of a bird in a tree nearby. Rudi took off his cap and began to wave it slowly over his head. Elisabeth had no cap on her blonde plaits: she drew a handkerchief from her belt and waved upwards at Stephan. Angélique went very pale and looked at her father who sat firm and rigid in the saddle with his hat in his hand. Then she began to shiver all over. Elisabeth put her arm round her shoulder.

"Stephan!" shouted Rudi with his young strong voice that passed like a cold delight through them all. And again: "Stephan!" Bismark came running from the wood. He stopped panting in front of them, wondering why they were calling.

"Talk, Bismark!" said the Major. The dog barked.

Georg turned his horse. "Come along, let's go on now."

Angélique felt the most forlorn of them all. Elisabeth realized that she must take pity on her small sister. As Mama was unable for the present to give them lessons, she composed sums for her sister and

wrote out words which Angélique copied with an unsteady hand. She talked to her, consoled her and made her sleep with her at night. At last Angélique transferred much of the attachment she used to have for Stephan to Elisabeth, and began to love her with the same passionate excess with which she used to hate and attack her.

Elisabeth rejoiced at her victory, even though she did not always welcome Angélique's exaggerated expressions of affection. During the night her little sister sometimes clasped her with such wild despair. "What's the matter?" Elisabeth would ask, "are you thinking of Stephan?" Angélique stammered a confused reply. No, she was not thinking of Stephan, but she did so love Elisabeth. She could not help it if she loved her so.

Sometimes Elisabeth discussed the little sister with Rudi. He did not take her so seriously: she made him smile. "Yes, I know, she's a bit queer sometimes" he admitted. He was so quiet and reasonable himself. When Elisabeth felt a little nervous or unhappy, because of all that had recently happened, she had only to go to Rudi and she felt better at once.

One thing about Rudi caused her anxiety. While she told Angélique how Stephan was now living in Heaven, she could see him there in her thoughts, dressed in his white night-gown in the midst of a glorious flood of golden light, listening with his big dark eyes to what God was telling him and the other little angels. She heard seraphic music that filled her with peace, even though it left her with a softly aching grief because she could no longer wash Stephan in the morning, dress him, listen to his excited voice or see him rushing ahead of her on his pony. But she suspected that Rudi did not believe in this consoling supernatural picture. One day she could not help asking him. He looked up and hesitated. "I should like to believe it," he confessed honestly, "but when I try to see it before me very clearly, I think, all at once: No, it can't be that way. And it wouldn't do for Stephan either. He always wanted to do something that was forbidden, and what he liked best was something dangerous. Well, I can't imagine anything in Heaven that would be dangerous or not allowed. No, I feel more that Stephan is still somewhere near us, in the morning when we go riding and at night when we go to bed."

Rudi's voice suddenly dropped into a whisper. "I'll tell you what I really think: it's only when we'll have forgotten him entirely that he will really be dead."

"But we'll never forget him," protested Elisabeth. She had been listening with bated breath. Now she shuddered. "Rudi, what would the priest say if he knew that you don't believe in Heaven? Oh, you must believe in it, Rudi! Don't you know it's wicked not to believe in Heaven!"

"I can't help it, can I, if I don't believe in it?" And, in order to

defend himself, he added: "And I'm practically certain that Papa doesn't believe in it either."

Torn by inner doubts, Elisabeth looked at her brother. She was struggling for an argument that would dispose of his error. "But that morning when we were riding in the wood and Papa said: 'Now Stephan is looking at us from Heaven?'"—"He only said that because he knew we were all thinking of him. It was so lovely to be able to shout out his name!"

A vague despair gripped Elisabeth: "But Mama! Rudi, Mama does believe that Stephan is now with God in Heaven!"

"Then she should be the least sorry of us all."

Elisabeth slowly nodded assent. Ideas were moving a little fast for her. "And how do you manage then when you go to confession?" she asked with a sigh. "Don't you confess all this?"

"No, not this kind of thing. Because all that would happen would be that he would begin to tell me about Heaven all over again, and I can't believe it the way he does. And then I'd feel ashamed. I don't know precisely why. Perhaps because I don't know for certain whether he believes in it himself."

"But Rudi . . .!"

He continued to talk very rapidly: "I just can't imagine that Father Aigner believes in those things. The parish priest might, perhaps."

Rudi was trying to find grounds for his suspicion.

"He's such an old man . . . When I go to confession I only tell things about which I feel sorry. Last time I confessed that I didn't want to let Stephan blow my trumpet one day when he asked me to. And I believe I confessed that only because I hoped that perhaps Stephan might hear me."

Elisabeth continued to look unsteadily at her brother through her large eyes. She thought his reckless independence very brave. One had to be a boy to dare think such thoughts, a man like Papa. She was only a girl and she thought it reassuring that all things, even those that were invisible, were kept in readiness for her. All she had to do was to believe in them.

In the autumn the ordinary lessons were resumed. The violin master was not allowed to return, because Maria's nerves could not yet stand music in the house. Three times a week a certificated teacher came from Klagenfurt. Herr Kirschbaum had to teach the children the usual subjects, and to set them home-work for the days he did not come. Some supervision was required on those days, and the Major thought at once of Aunt Frieda. As was to be expected the dear lady made no difficulty whatever.

Of course Georg might have supervised the studies of the children himself, and probably better than Aunt Frieda. The kind soul would

never be able to find out whether Rudi did Angélique's sums. But Georg had another purpose. He hoped that Frieda would exercise a soothing influence upon Maria, who was still fighting the inner struggle that isolated her more and more from him and from the children. With the first melancholy signs of the arrival of autumn her condition pointed to an imminent crisis. Frieda was shocked at the sight of Maria.

"You ought to go for another journey to the south," she told Georg. "Here, she is continually reminded of her boy. Day and night there is nothing in her head but Stephan, Stephan. And autumn is rather depressing here. When one wakes at night one always hears the sound of the wind through the dark woods. Even I find it difficult to fall asleep here. Do take her to Nice."

He sighed. Dr. Prisswitz, who remembered the success of the previous trip, had given the same advice. But this time Georg did not believe that the change of surroundings would restore Maria's health and balance. He lacked the courage to discuss the matter with her.

He saw only one way to a cure. But it was impossible to discuss it with Frieda. As for Dr. Prisswitz . . . ! Perhaps, he said to himself, it was just the kind of coarse inspiration that could only germinate in a soldier's brain. He kept it to himself, continually ruminating the risk, and he waited throughout summer to see whether perhaps Maria might not recover by her own unaided strength. Stephan's birthday would have fallen at the end of the month. Elisabeth told Georg that Angélique didn't want any presents now that her twin brother could not get any. His face became dark with irritation. Maria happened just to have told him that she wanted to spend the whole day alone with her son, and was going to pray in the chapel where Stephan had appeared to her.

The time for action seemed to have arrived. In the morning he went with the children to the little grave with a bouquet of roses and a wreath of wild flowers that had been made by Elisabeth and Angélique. Then he went to the darkened bedroom where his wife was still in bed. He opened the curtains: "Listen, Maria. If you're not ill you must get up. Stephan is not the only one whose birthday it is to-day. There's Angélique too. I'll call her up and say that you want to wish her many happy returns."

As he spoke, he avoided her eyes. He knew how bitterly he was hurting her. She had half-risen in her bed, and her indignation was such that she could not utter a word. A little awkwardly he placed a small parcel before her. "Look, I've bought something you can give her."

Maria looked at the parcel which appeared to contain a doll. And suddenly she felt again as she felt a few months earlier when he had also taken her by surprise in the same ruthless manner. She realized

her guilt. She looked at him, helpless and frightened, seized his hand and begged: "Oh, you give it her! Please! I can't! Really, Georg, I can't do it!"—"And yet you must!" he said with determination. "Even if it were only because Angélique won't take a present from any one else. It's still in your hands, Maria, to make your children grow up like normal human beings, and to leave them a happy memory of their childhood."

She shuddered. "What is there I can give to my children? I'm ill, Georg. I'm ill, even though you won't believe me, and even though the doctor may have told you differently. "I'm ill and I shall never recover."

He folded her in his arms: "Maria . . . I shall cure you!"

She shook her head slowly and incredulously, and tried to free herself from his arms. But he did not let go. Suddenly he gathered up his courage: "Maria . . . I shall give Stephan back to you!"

She looked at him, deadly pale with amazement.

"If you still have the courage, Maria!"

"Go away!" she whispered hoarsely with a gesture of disgust.

His arms dropped heavily along his body. He moved back profoundly disappointed and humiliated.

Thinking it over he realized how profoundly offended Maria must have been by his brutal suggestion. Stephan was dead, no other child could take his place. It was a grievous injustice to the dead child to have imagined for one moment that it was possible. But he had spoken with the best intentions. And he was still convinced that only renewed motherhood could cure Maria. Their other children had acquired such marked personalities that she would not find in any of them what she had lost in Stephan. But if she became a mother once more, the unfolding mystery of this new little life would absorb her. Her religious temperament would persuade her that God had returned Stephan to her in the person of her youngest child. The child would have to be a boy, of course. But as to this not a doubt arose in Georg's mind. It was his way of believing in divine Providence.

No doubt it was wrong to talk as he did, but nevertheless his words achieved something. For a while Maria felt so bitter towards him that her attention wandered away from the memory of her dead child. And he achieved even more. He had been unable to make her think of the three surviving children, but the child which until this moment had lived only in his thoughts presently began to occupy her also. Several days after the conversation, while they were sitting together in the quiet drawing-room, Maria was suddenly swept away by a wave of tenderness, and without any preliminary she asked: "Would you like it very much, then?"

He knew at once what she meant. He felt his heart beat in his throat. He had not even given a thought to this aspect of the question:

would he himself like another son in the place of Stephan? His quartet, his dream that had been so cruelly shattered, would be restored at least in appearance. Yes, perhaps he was weak enough still to want this to happen. But what did it matter? He had not the right to ask Maria for his own sake. He would never take such a responsibility. He told her this quietly, and with a clear conscience. She listened to him nervously and with an air of unhappiness.

"But do you believe, Georg, that such a thing would be possible? Supposing we had another son, and we called him Stephan, and all the time that I was expecting him I were to think of Stephan . . . Do you believe that . . .?"

"What matters is that *you* should believe it," he said.

Her eyes anxiously sought his. "If I knew that it could mean a new happiness for you," she brought out with hesitation, hungrily seeking his support. Oh, why was he so stupid? Why could he not understand her?

He made an awkward gesture of denial. "Maria, I've just been telling you . . ."

She was no longer listening. "There's something else," she said softly with a shudder. "If another child were to come, Georg, in the place of Stephan . . . Wouldn't it again . . . Wouldn't God once more want . . .?"

"Why do you, who have more faith than I have, think so ill of God?" asked Georg, at the same time startled and full of pity.

She drew a deep breath. At last her hand sought his and helpless, remorseful, she whispered: "Georg . . . I believe . . . that I want another little Stephan."

Her wish did not materialize as soon as she had expected and she became impatient. She suddenly found herself unable to wait for the son who was to take Stephan's place in her heart. But this expectation, the knowledge of the danger she was going to run brought a new tension into her life. The apathy which threatened to drag her down disappeared. She gathered strength. She knew that it was necessary for her to be stronger. Dr. Prisswitz was pleased with her. He no longer talked of the Riviera. Through some kind of miracle she appeared to have found the way to health without going away.

When, towards the end of the year, Maria had at last the certainty she wanted, Georg saw no reason to make a secret of the real reason of her recovery. He told the family doctor, who bowed his head. This time he did not venture any reproaches. He recovered his native optimism and consoled Georg and himself by bravely declaring: "Well, we'll see her through. After all, she was better last time than I expected." Georg told his children to get out their instruments and to study a few Christmas carols. He warned them that Mama

would cry, but after all, he said, that was suitable at Christmas time. He fetched his violin from upstairs and played Stephan's part to the best of his ability.

The Christmas tree with its silver ornaments was lit and the four of them placed themselves behind their desks. Georg and Angélique opened with the first few beats of *Stille Nacht* and then Elisabeth and Rudi joined in with deeper strains. At once they recaptured the mysteriously exalted atmosphere of that morning in the woods. Stephan was looking down on them from Heaven. And just as on that occasion they lifted their voices towards him, they now played for him. What made this meeting with Stephan lovelier and more moving still was that Mama was with them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SUCCESSOR

PAPA called the three of them into the library and told them the great secret. They were big enough, he said, to hear it beforehand and to rejoice: "In a few weeks' time Mama would give them another little brother." The children looked at their father with trembling lips, almost incredulous. But even though he had a faint smile his face was serious. And when Papa spoke seriously no one ever doubted his word. They rushed to their mother who took them in her arms.

"Is it really true, Mama?"

"If Papa has told you it must be true."

Aunt Frieda was seated by the window, sewing a baby's vest. She seemed to have a heap of them already. How lovely all these small clothes were! Red with excitement, Elisabeth and Angélique asked whether they could help. Angélique had not yet learned to sew, but Aunt Frieda had taught her to embroider seams and hems. Rudi was sorry because there was nothing he could do for the new little brother until he thought of his old toys. He fetched them down and began to mend them as much as possible.

At night the children held a whispered conversation. They wondered how Mama could give them a new brother in the place of Stephan and how she could know beforehand. They dwelt in a magic sphere, and their respect for their mother became almost religious. Where was the little brother to come from? Angélique asked shyly whether perhaps Mama was going to fetch it from Heaven. Rudi was sure it could not be done in that way. He had a vague idea that perhaps Mama would think ever so hard of this new brother, till one night she would suddenly find it in her arms. Perhaps she had to say a word which only grown-ups knew, and then that word would turn into a little child. Elisabeth did not contribute to the conversation. At the farm she had heard that the doctor had to be called and that it was something dangerous. She was afraid of the night when the little brother would appear.

One afternoon Krone was sent to town unexpectedly. Anna nervously removed her apron and went upstairs to Mama's bedroom. Papa came and told them that they must go to bed early. When they woke up the next morning the little brother was quite likely to be there. They were much under the impression of the event and obeyed readily. Aunt Frieda saw them to bed, and to all their questions

she only answered with a smile. How did she manage to remain so calm! While they were lying in their beds they heard the carriage return, and then they caught the hurried steps of Dr. Prisswitz on the stairs. Long after Rudi and Angélique had fallen asleep Elisabeth continued to listen. Once she fancied that she heard a cry from Mama. She became so frightened that she drew the blankets over her head. But the darkness in which she took refuge brought no solace. She had to listen again. She crept quietly out of bed and placed her head against the door. She did not know how long she had been watching when she heard a door open and close again. It was the door of Mama's bedroom, and footsteps drew near. She ventured her head through the opening of the door. "Anna!" she whispered.

Anna uttered a soft exclamation. "Whatever is this? Aren't you asleep yet?" she tried to say severely. But at the same time she could not help telling the news: "The little brother has come. Aren't you glad now?"—"And Mama?" Elisabeth asked, tightly gripping Anna's arm. Anna involuntarily took a step back. She was a little shocked. "Mama is quite all right," she said. "Now then, you get back into bed, as quick as lightning! Supposing your father were to find you!" Elisabeth fled back to bed and crept into the warm hollow of the blankets. Everything now was light and restful about her and she dropped off at once.

When she woke up the next morning, Papa was in the room and told them that the little brother had really arrived during the night. They must get up quickly and pick some flowers outside. Then, when Mama was awake, they could take them to her and have a peep at the cradle. The children jumped out of bed and dressed as quickly as they could manage. They wanted to go to the farm with their great news, and they were disappointed when they found that every one knew it already. After breakfast they were at last allowed into Mama's room, each carrying a bouquet of wild flowers. Mama was too tired to lift her head, but her large moist eyes shone brightly at them. Maria was waiting to hear what they would say about the little fellow whom Aunt Frieda was displaying to them. They were much taken aback: they had not imagined that he would be so tiny. Rudi had brought a little horse to his brother, but he realized now that there would be no question of playing with him yet awhile.

"What's his name?" Elisabeth asked excitedly. The Major had a moment's hesitation before he answered:

"Stephan."

Stephan . . .! A shock went through them. Georg felt it and explained: "Mama has called this little brother after Stephan so that we shall never forget him."

Though the children heard his explanation in silence they accepted

it at once. Angélique was the first to risk an awkward caress over the tiny red fist. "It will be a long time before he can play with us," said Rudi, his voice betraying his disappointment. "He's looking at us!" said Elisabeth softly. They were all allowed to kiss his forehead. They wanted to whisper his name, but none of them could bring himself to pronounce it. Papa said that they ought to allow Mama to rest now. They tiptoed out of the room.

Maria recovered from her fourth confinement much sooner than Dr. Prisswitz had dared to hope. Aunt Frieda's soothing presence contributed much to this. To her all things were simple and natural. Where she appeared there were no problems. A year before she listened to Maria's announcement that Georg wanted another son in the place of Stephan as though it were the simplest thing in the world. "Of course, and it would be very good for you too, Maria." She did not even seem to suspect that it might involve any danger.

Her own courage seemed boundless: nothing ever frightened her or disturbed her balance. Fatigue, or the necessity to sleep and have meals at regular intervals did not exist for her. If no one happened to require her, she sometimes had forty winks on a chair. Afterwards she stoutly denied that she had been asleep. "I've merely shut my eyes for a moment. And now I feel quite fresh again," she said, continuing the sewing that had dropped into her lap.

Aunt Frieda did not experience the slightest difficulty about calling the new born baby by its name. "Well, let's go and see what little Stephan wants now," she said when she heard him cry.

Stephan . . .! Maria, who was lying quietly in her bed, heard the name. Happily she was able to feed the child herself. She took it from Frieda's hands and looked at it while it was drinking. It was slender and its hair was dark like that of Stephan. But the first Stephan never knew her breast. Frieda left the room for a moment, and then Maria ventured for the first time to whisper his name into his ear. "Stephan!" A feeling of confusion passed through her. To whom had she spoken this word? She had so often whispered it into the deep echo-less darkness of cruel nights! Now the child was there, looking at her a little surprised with its clear friendly eyes. There are so many mysteries in the glance of a newly-born child. Does it know about life and death? Does it know of the pains and the joys of its mother?

"Stephan . . .!" Maria whispered into the small pink ear. He no longer looked up. He was used to his name and continued to drink. "Stephan . . . Stephan . . . Stephan. . .!"

The baby was good-tempered and friendly. He laughed at his brother and at his sisters when they bent over his cradle and shook

his rattle. He gripped the toys they pressed into his small hands, although he did not know how to use them. He tried to lift his head over the edge of the cradle to see where they were going. On the farm, the news that the Baron had given the name of Stephan to the little boy who had been born to take the place of the dead one was received in silence and with a pitying look. The mere thought of it startled the maids. But once they had set eyes upon the little fellow they all agreed that they recognized in him something of the former Stephan. They were the first in whom the memory of the dead Stephan was making place for his successor.

"Stephan can sit up in his cradle!" or: "Stephan's trying to talk! He's just said, 'Mama' very plainly!"—"Stephan . . . Stephan . . ." Do they never think of anything else when they say this name, Elisabeth wondered as Rudi and Angélique were talking. Sometimes it was as though she suddenly woke up, wondering what Stephan up there in Heaven must have thought about the one who had taken his place. "Oh, Stephan, I still think of you! I know that our new little brother isn't you!" But usually she said to herself that Angélique was still too small to remember. As for Rudi . . . What did he tell her once? "It will only be when we no longer think of Stephan that he'll really be dead." And was not Rudi himself forgetting him? What a strange and unexpected way of forgetting Stephan!

At last she could no longer keep silent. She told Rudi, hoping that he would show how mistaken she was. Of course, she knew at once that she had been wrong. One look he gave her revealed how small and foolish she was in comparison with her elder brother. "Why do you think I'm forgetting Stephan?" he asked with his characteristic smile. "Can't you understand that we're all doing it for Mama's sake?"

She felt utterly ashamed, and found no reply. "For Mama's sake, and for Angélique's," he added. She agreed. It was such a relief to her. They had to make-believe that the Stephan who had rushed into death while playing, and the Stephan upstairs in his cradle were one and the same, because it was necessary for the sake of Mama, who had been ill with grief, and for the sake of Angélique who was still so small. And at once she felt confident that the dead Stephan would understand. She was no longer afraid to ride with Papa and the others along that clearing in the wood there where they could be seen from Heaven.

The summer was warm and full of sunshine, and they went for a swim with Papa every day. In their natural way the three children threw off their clothes and jumped straight into the water. For this

reason Georg sought out a secluded place curtained off by trees. He wore a striped cotton bathing suit which he happened to have kept from his young days. It hung about him in curious folds and destroyed his martial aspect. Once or twice a peasant cast an inquisitive look through the foliage, and told the people at home about the godless nudism of the Baron's children. But this talk never reached Georg's ears.

Once some young men who were spending their holiday at Klagenfurt ventured rather close to the bathers in a sailing boat. The Baron turned red with fury and swam out towards them. Bismark accompanied him as though he knew that a display of force was required. The young men wore the white caps of naval cadets. They watched the Major with some merriment. To show how little they minded him, they lowered their sail and waited for him. As the angrily puffing sea-lion's head drew nearer them they nudged each other and chuckled. Georg took hold of the side of the boat and said: "If you young men don't clear out at once, I shall leave the water with my children. But in that case I give you my word that you'll have reason to remember this adventure."

The young men were rather taken back. His manner immediately revealed the officer: none of them had the slightest doubt on the subject. The eldest, who was at the helm, jumped up and tried to stand to attention on the insecure deck of the little boat, while his companions also tried to get up. He gave a stiff salute and replied in military manner: "Beg pardon, sir!"

Still angry but a little softened by this reaction Georg let go and swam back with Bismark. As he went, he wondered how he could have executed his threat. He was not a rear-admiral, after all, and not even an active officer. Meanwhile the cadets hastily hoisted sail. "I think he'll let us off, don't you?" whispered the eldest—"I'm sure he was the military governor. I think I recognised his moustache," said another, wiping the perspiration from under his cap. It was only when they had disappeared round the bend that their courage returned. "I say, when I'm a grandfather, I'll also go swimming with my granddaughters!" Partly owing to this incident, partly also as the result of a cautious hint by the old parish priest, Georg decided to buy bathing suits for his children. Elisabeth dutifully wore hers, but Angélique who was only eight declared that she preferred the touch of the water on her naked skin. Rudi, who often went for a swim across the lake by himself, usually tied his swimming drawers round his neck.

At home, surrounded by attention, little Stephan sat quietly in his cradle or on the ground. His brother and sisters placed toy animals before him, constructed towers with wooden blocks and threw them over with much noise. If this made him laugh they felt abundantly

rewarded. If he cried, a thing that did not often happen, assistance arrived from every side. His two sisters guided his first steps through the room. Maria waited for him with bright eyes and open arms. Georg looked on with a smile—he had reason to be satisfied with what he had achieved.

Maria was absorbed by her little Stephan. Events that should have profoundly shocked her sensitive nature hardly reached her notice. What a terrible winter it was! One morning Joseph did not turn up, and it was discovered that he had left with only a small suitcase. He left a pathetic note for Trudi, in which he gave no address. The station-master said that he had bought a ticket for Vienna. The news of his disappearance was so startling that no one could believe it at first. Everybody told Trudi that he would realize the error of his ways and come back in a few days. But she knew that her husband would never return. Much indignation was felt in the castle and on the farm when it was found that she was with child. No doubt she had taken a foolish decision, but she had noticed a growing restlessness in her husband ever since he had accompanied the Major to Vienna for the funeral of the Empress. After his return Joseph lived by his wife's side but his thoughts were far away. At last she decided upon this desperate remedy to bind him to her. But it achieved the opposite result. When he knew that he would become a father Joseph ran away in a panic.

Georg informed the police and the address of the fugitive was soon discovered. He wrote that for the sake of Trudi and of the child that was going to be born, he was prepared to forgive Joseph and take him back in his service. The Major was confident that Joseph was already repenting his rash act. But although the appearance of the police at his lodgings gave him a moment of fright, Joseph was obdurate. He replied that he would contribute a part of his earnings for the maintenance of his wife, but that he never wanted to see her again. He did not even mention the child.

Krone had taken to drinking again. On the last day of February he stayed at the inn till midnight, playing cards with his friends. When they walked out he was a little tipsy. It was snowing outside, and Lisl Ochsenbeim, the landlord's daughter, asked whether he wouldn't prefer to stay the night rather than go such a long walk through the dark. He told her not to worry: he knew a short cut, a very short cut. Had Lisl known that he meant the railway track, she would have tried to persuade him not to use it. At home Anna waited for her husband till dawn. As long as it was dark she hoped that he would come back unnoticed. She felt it would be a disgrace if she had to tell other people, and she hoped the Baron would not hear about it. But at daybreak she decided to go for help to the farm.

During the short walk from the castle she realized that there was no doubt whatever in her mind that she would not see her husband alive any more. She ran till she was out of breath, and wondered why she did it: fate, which had drawn nearer every day, struck its blow. Toni and a few of the men went along the road to find Krone. Eisengruber expressed the fear that he had fallen and was perhaps lying under the snow, with a twisted ankle, as he was kind enough to say, though what he meant was, "in a drunken stupor." "Why did you not come sooner?" he asked Anna reproachfully.

"It has happened so often before!" she replied. "Perhaps he has stayed the night at the inn."

Eisengruber looked at his wife. For whose benefit was Anna pretending, for theirs or for her own?

Toni and his companions crossed the wood by various paths, but it was hopeless searching in the snow which had fallen more than a foot during the night. One might easily step over the lost man without noticing him. The search came to an abrupt end when from the direction of Seekirchen a few men appeared bearing a stretcher on which were the remains of Krone, covered with his own great-coat. Toni was the only one of these big strong country boys who had the courage to lift a corner of the coat. But he dropped it at once, and found it difficult to keep his thoughts together. After a brief discussion it was decided that he would hurry on to prepare Anna as far as possible. The others decided to linger a little with the stretcher.

Not far from the castle Toni met the Major who had saddled his horse himself and hurried out. Georg immediately decided that the stretcher was on no account to enter the castle. The body was to be taken back to Seekirchen and to be placed in the coffin at once: the widow was not to see it. He galloped back to the castle to break the news to Anna as gently as possible, and to get her to agree to the decision he had taken in her own interest. Apart from this, his main concern was to keep the details of the accident from Maria and from the children.

What a terrible winter it was! This second calamity of which their old friend Krone was the victim horrified the children. Happily Anna surprised everybody by her courage. It seemed that after her amazing self-control a dangerous reaction must set in. But her quiet behaviour was not really due to self-control. "Why should I cry?" she asked Magdalena Eisengruber. "I have no tears left. I've known for a long time that something like this was bound to come. He's found rest at any rate, now, and I must submit. I'm resigned and the only thing I find it difficult to accept is that it had to happen in this dreadful way. As soon as I'm alone I see it happen before my eyes. They've tried to spare me the sight of him. It was well-meant

of them, but I do know precisely how they found him there on the rails. I can see it!" Anna's eyes stared in front of her. Magdalena Eisengruber took her hand.

"If any one can understand you, I can, Anna."

Anna nodded slowly. She hadn't thought yet of the dreadful accident with the cart loaded with beetroots when Magdalena's boy was killed, fourteen or fifteen years ago.

"I still see him, Anna, when I'm awake at nights," said Magdalena Eisengruber.

For the children Anna tried to remain her old self. But she noticed that they were afraid to come near her. One day she called them into her kitchen, and trying to put a little merriness in her voice, she said: "What's the matter with you? Are you running away from me? You children are all I've left. Don't you know that I've got to cook for you until you're all grown up? Then you'll all fly away from the house, and Anna will be able to join her husband. You may be sure he's waiting impatiently for me."

The children looked at her a little awkwardly, but Anna played the comedy so well that they forgot their shyness. Everything was simple and natural once more, and they were glad to help her with some of the things Krone used to do for her. They spent the whole afternoon with her, and ran away only just in time to go and wash their hands before dinner. Anna had to sit down on a chair to recover from her emotion.

"Come along," she said to Mariedl, a young girl from the farm who was assisting her for the time being. "Take these things upstairs." She stood up and wiped the tears impatiently from her red face.

Georg disliked the idea of appointing a successor to Krone, but the work in the stables had to be done. He took the opportunity to choose a younger man who could also serve at table and would not mind doing a few other jobs that used to be done by Joseph. In the spring, just when it was becoming rather difficult for Eisengruber to dispense with one of his hands to look after the stables and the horses, the combined manservant and coachman made his entry in the castle. He was called Ignatius, Ignaz for short, and had gipsy curls and smiling raven-black eyes. After a quarter of an hour he was perfectly at ease with the two women in the kitchen, where Trudi had resumed her place as Anna's assistant. The first time he served at table he showed himself a born waiter. In the stables he sang his repertoire of Slovene popular songs, and in the case of some of them it was just as well that they could not be understood. He talked to the horses as though they were old friends. Anna looked after the new coachman just as she had looked in the past after her husband.

He called her "Mother," and she seemed to like it. When she called him into the kitchen for his meal he answered singing from the stable: "Right you are, Mother, you can serve it up!" She turned back to her oven with a satisfied chuckle.

Ignaz played the zither and had as much success with the maids at the farm as in the kitchen. They devoured him with their eyes, as he sat there in the evening, his coat loose over his shoulder, bending over his instrument, a long wisp of hair hanging down his forehead, and looking fixedly at the steel strings which his muscular brown fingers caused to trill so melodiously. There was about him a sensuous romanticism that bewitched every woman. The men looked at him with suspicion and envy, but they too were unable to resist his charm, and willy-nilly, they made part of the circle round the table on which he played his zither.

Trudi was no longer in the habit of spending her evenings on the farm, but now she returned, ignoring the unspoken mockery of the maids. Mariedl used to sit at Ignaz' side, red with excitement, her arm pressed against his. Sometimes he would bend his head very close to hers. Once Trudi had noticed this, she consoled herself with the thought that she was too good for a man who was merely trying to sleep with each of the girls in turn. In the evening she dragged herself early to her little room, but when she lay in bed, the sounds from the farm reached her confusedly through the open attic window. And she thought of Joseph, who ran away from her, and whose child she killed before it was born. She would gladly have forgotten all she had been through owing to his fault, if only he came back to her.

Like every one in the castle Ignaz soon learned to spoil little Stephan who came down to the courtyard with his sisters, or alone, if he could. He lifted up the little chap and placed him on the back of one of the ponies. As Ignaz had not witnessed the accident with the first Stephan, he could not understand why this frightened Anna so much and he nodded at the Baroness who was looking down from her window. He almost gave her a reassuring wink.

Stephan naturally soon discovered that Ignaz allowed him more freedom than did the others. This gave Ignaz a kind of secret amusement. He noticed how the little rascal struggled away from his mother's tempestuous embraces in order to run to him. "You all treat that boy in such a queer way," he told Anna. She merely sighed in reply.

Maria did not fail to notice how little impression the words of love she whispered into the boy's ear made on him. She pretended not to be hurt. If he wanted so much to go to Ignaz, let him go: she was not going to keep him back. But nothing could stop her from always keeping an eye on him. Did she not live for him alone? Certainly

she was fond of her other three children, also of her husband; but in a very different way. This child was something between God and herself which no one else could understand. Had she still been her old self she would have tried to divide her love equitably between all she possessed on earth. But she was not herself any more, and she could only look at things in their connection with Stephan. In the course of the summer Georg came to tell her that the old parish priest of Seekirchen was retiring into a monastery and that Father Aigner would probably come to take his place. To Maria this appeared merely as another dispensation of God. Heaven was now sending Father Aigner back to assist her in the protection of her boy.

It was not before spring had returned that Father Aigner made his entry into Seekirchen. It was a festive occasion, with flowers, and the ringing of bells, and little girls in white. Elisabeth and Angélique, who had done their first communion at Easter, were allowed to take part in the reception. At the entrance of the village an archway had been put up, and the veteran-corps received Father Aigner with music and a salvo of guns. The village had not forgotten its beloved priest, and Father Aigner had been presented with a difficult dilemma because his parishioners at Sankt Nicolai would also have liked to keep him. But when he left Seekirchen he had promised to come back if ever he were called. So when the people of Seekirchen heard that their own parish priest was leaving they sent a special deputation to the bishop at Klagenfurt.

Father Aigner would have liked to come to Maria-Licht one Sunday in the month to celebrate Mass as he used to do. But as his parish absorbed all his attention, he had to leave this privilege to his assistant, although this young man had never succeeded in capturing the Major's goodwill sufficiently to be invited to dinner once in all these years. Father Aigner decided to break a lance in his favour. He paid an unexpected visit to the castle and tried to explain to the Major that his assistant was full of goodwill, but still a young man who imagined that angry looks could convert all the sinners in the world. Georg poured out his best Tokay, as he used to do, and listened unmoved to Father Aigner's plea. Meanwhile Maria was waiting impatiently to have the visitor to herself. When the Major retired Father Aigner was a little startled at the exaltation with which she at once began to talk about Stephan. God, she said, had restored Stephan to her, and out of gratitude she wanted the child to become a priest. Nothing would make her give way, this time, for it was only if she acted thus, she felt convinced, that God would allow the child to live.

Not wanting to lose her confidence, the priest kept silent and drew

the little man of whom they were talking to his knee. While he made a little joke to get him to laugh, he looked attentively at him and found that there was indeed a considerable likeness to his deceased namesake. But at the same time he detected a different being behind these slightly distrustful eyes. And he feared that perhaps Maria would commit an injustice to this independent creature. He would have to protect it, but with the greatest possible circumspection. The first thing to do was to gain the confidence and the affection of the child. Each time he came on a visit, he brought a little present for Stephan and soon the child ran to meet him when he knew he was coming.

When Rudi and his sisters came to confession at the priest's house their old friend kept them a little in order to question them. Gradually he began to realize that these children were growing up as though they had no mother. They talked of their mother lovingly, but almost as though she were no longer alive. It was the unquestioning veneration of an ideal that had been imprinted into their young souls. And their veneration for Mama's darling Stephan was of the same nature. They would never have dreamt that there could be the slightest blemish in him. He was the personification of their dead brother's memory.

Their father-confessor tried very cautiously to make them realize that they ought not to make a confusion between the little brother of flesh and blood and the other one who was in Heaven. Such a confusion would result in the spoiling of Stephan, who would never get the feeling that he was genuinely one of them and that he should be ready to give them as much kindness as they gave him. The children looked up with astonishment. How could Father Aigner talk like this! He who had been called in by Papa when things were so bad with Mama!

He pretended not to notice their silent reproaches. He told them a story of Stephan that was meant to show him as an ordinary child. They knew that he usually brought him a bar of chocolate or some other sweetmeat in order to remain friends with him. On his last visit he happened to come without a present. There was Stephan running expectantly towards him. "Stephan," he said, "don't be angry with me. During my walk I suddenly felt so hungry that I couldn't help eating the piece of chocolate I was bringing you." He did this to see whether Stephan would mind very much. Just for a moment Stephan did look rather unhappy, but then he asked: "And are you still hungry?"—"Yes, I am."—"All right, just wait a moment," replied Stephan. He ran away and came back with a big piece of chocolate which he had stolen from his mother's cupboard!

"Didn't Mama tell you the story?" he asked innocently.

The children shook their heads and felt a little uncomfortable.

"You see," said Father Aigner, "she won't admit that the little rascal could steal a bar of chocolate!"

The three of them at once rushed to their little brother's defence: "But it was for you that he stole the chocolate!"

"Yes, that time. But can you tell me how he was able to find the chocolate so quickly?"

"Well, but, even if he helps himself to a sweet occasionally . . . he is still so small!"

"Of course, of course, I don't think it's dreadful at all. That's why I don't mind telling you. But why won't Mama let you know? If she had told you, you would all have enjoyed the joke!"

Again the children agreed, but with a touch of hesitation. Something of what Father Aigner meant was becoming clear to them.

The priest's clear eyes looked right through their souls. It did not take him long to discover that Rudi was a sceptic. One day when he had the boy by himself he asked him how he came to have these doubts. Rudi blushed but preserved his composure and defended himself much as he had done to Elisabeth on an earlier occasion. Father Aigner listened with an expression of benevolence. "You have a good brain and open eyes," he said, "and therefore you refuse to believe anything you can't explain for yourself. I should be the last to ask you to accept anything you can't believe. Form your own opinions by all means, and get views that are as profound as you can make them. Meditate about what the Church teaches us. The more you do, the lovelier you will find her teachings. The more you think about it, the more will the story of creation and of the birth and the sufferings of Our Lord appear to you as something mighty, wise, and permeated with supernatural beauty. You will never be foolish enough, Rudi, merely to shrug your shoulders at these things. Science, and especially natural science, has its own vast field, but what it can give us is poor and insignificant in comparison to the revelation that has been made to our souls. Faith is a gift, and he who has this gift is armed against life and against death."

Rudi could not help thinking how his mother had more faith than any of them, and how she constantly needed to be helped by all of them in order to overcome the distress caused by the loss of the first Stephan. Nevertheless the conversation with Father Aigner made a profound impression on him. Elisabeth was glad to notice that he went to church without resentment. "I could never quite understand how you dared go into church when you believed so little," she said. Rudi did not reply. Couldn't she see that he was doing his best to find the way he had lost? It was not his fault if he remained unsuccessful. He preferred horseback, and the rides through the woods with his father. The half-dark of the church, the sickly sweet odour of the candles and of the incense, and the

exhalations of a crowd of people, together with the monotonous chanting of Latin words, all co-operated to give him a feeling of oppression. Throughout the service he craved for fresh air and the open sky.

The following autumn Uncle Otto at last paid the visit that had so often been announced and put off. Rudi was fourteen now and almost a man, and he was allowed for the first time to go shooting with the others. During the summer he had been trained by his father in the use of the rifle, and his young eyes enabled him to hit the bull's eye more often than did his father.

Rudi was allowed the first shot and as he pulled the trigger he knew that the bullet had found its home. Never before had he killed so deliberately. The deer which they had stalked cautiously against the wind lifted its head with an enquiring look, and seemed more guileless even than that mare his father had once to shoot. A couple of young deer rushed away from the meadow where they had been grazing towards the cover of the wood. They cried out to their leader who had sunk down moaning gently. As the men ran towards him he turned his head in their direction, but his glazing eyes saw nothing but the death he could not escape. Warm dark blood rushed from his open mouth.

"There's nothing more to be done—a splendid shot, Rudi!" said Uncle Otto. Rudi was pale. What did his father and Uncle Otto feel about this great pain they were witnessing? He suddenly knew that he was not a hunter. Franz bent forward to tie up the feet of the deer. His eldest son helped him with deft fingers. He had been with them on previous expeditions.

Later the child brought the antlers to Rudi who was of course entitled to them. Elisabeth admired her brother's prowess as always and Papa told him to nail his first shooting trophy as an ornament on the wall.

Since the summer vacation Rudi and Stephan had been given a room to themselves. Rudi felt very proud to have been made his little brother's protector and he was sorry that Stephan fled as often as possible from his well-intentioned guardianship to Ignaz who allowed him to do all manner of forbidden things. Rudi was obliged to rush after the young mischief and to talk to Ignaz in the tone of a young master. "Why do you allow him with the horses? You know he's been told not to." Ignaz looked very innocent. "But the horses are so trustworthy, Herr Rudolph! Apart from Kalmuk, perhaps, but I never allow him near Kalmuk." Stephan at once supported the servant. "No, I never get near Kalmuk. Don't be so silly, Rudi!" Rudi gave no reply, took Stephan by the hand and dragged him away. He disliked having to do this. It offended his own feelings to interfere

to such an extent with Stephan's freedom. But he had to for Mama's sake.

Stephan had another friend, a powerful one, who was actively at work on his behalf. When he was five, Father Aigner asked why he did not go riding with his brother and his sisters. At his age they were all allowed in the saddle. Maria gave a startled look at the priest. For some time already a silent struggle was going on between them. Maria felt that she lost ground at each encounter. She was bound to lose in the end if her boy took the side of the enemy. She could not bear that Stephan should be fonder of any one than of herself. When she saw him leaning against his big protector and looking at her with offended eyes, Maria gave way, although she had to stifle so many fears. Of course Stephan would be allowed to ride but only when Papa was there. And he would have to learn riding first.

"But Mama, I can ride! Ignaz taught me long ago!"

"Ignaz? . . . But when . . .?"

Father Aigner laughed.

Georg and the other children could hardly believe their ears when they were told the news. In the stables Ignaz sang his merriest song as he saddled one of the ponies for his little friend. Maria stayed behind at the castle giddy with fear. These rides of Stephan's were a torture for her, and she could breathe freely only when the riders came home unharmed.

The following summer Stephan naturally asked to go swimming with the others. Again there was a struggle, and Father Aigner won as usual. But perhaps the priest would have thrown himself into the battle with a little less enthusiasm and confidence if he had known the amazing recklessness of his protégé. Stephan's every step had been watched and protected so carefully that he did not know danger. At his age Rudi and Elisabeth had learned to be careful, but Stephan threw himself, without reflecting, into every kind of adventure. One could not say that he was seeking danger; it was merely that he followed an invariable inclination to do whatever he supposed to be forbidden. He would jump a hedge without first making sure that there was no ditch behind it, merely so that his father should not have time to forbid the jump. As soon as he was able to swim a few strokes he tried to make for the island towards which Papa and Rudi had gone. The young dare-devil's strength was rapidly giving way, and it cost Elisabeth incredible efforts to drag him to the shore. Angélique helped her, and the two of them found the task almost too much. Rudi and Papa hurried back as fast as they could, but without the girls they would have been too late. Stephan recovered very quickly from his fear and was already stoutly denying that he would have been unable to reach the island. When Rudi climbed up the bank a minute or so before his father, he found Elisabeth sobbing with her face in her hands:

“Rudi! He would have drowned before my eyes! Before my eyes!”

Of course Maria never came to hear of this escapade. Gradually she grew able to see her boy riding away without her heart contracting with fear. When he returned hours afterwards, she sometimes had a strange feeling. It was as though during his absence she had imagined him other than he really was. Then, for the duration of a second perhaps, she was able to separate the image of her living son from that of the dead one. And she could not possibly have said whether this discovery made her richer or poorer. Deep inside her she began to be aware of the differences, but she could not yet bring herself to admit their existence.

She could not find in the second Stephan the glowing spirit that shone from the eyes of the first. He was no fighter, no little crusader. And, when she told him of God and of the saints, he did not hang on her lips with dreamy, longing eyes. There was no trace of that joint rapture she had experienced with the dead Stephan. The first Stephan sought her company and expected everything from her, but the living one was impatient to escape from her embraces.

CHAPTER NINE

PAUL VON BRANDT

AFTER that Christmas when the Major and his three children revived the quartet as a surprise for Maria they did not play again. Somehow it seemed impossible to replace the voice that had dropped out. Georg himself was gradually losing his old fire. He grew quieter from year to year, and the hard lines that were on his face before his marriage returned, but this time they were deep and ineradicable. He knew that, when he lost his son, he had also lost his wife. She had not been restored to him by the birth of the second Stephan. He knew that his children were fond of him, at least the two eldest, but he kept them at a distance, and he did it intentionally. He wanted his children to be fond of their mother in the first place. It would have been too cheap a victory to capture them from Maria. He chose to be lonely rather than to give way to his feelings. He was determined to have nothing to reproach himself with and to remain an example of resignation and strength for his first-born.

The children imagined that when Stephan was old enough they would resume their concerts. But they forgot that by that time Rudi would have to go to the cadet school. Nor had they been able to foresee that Stephan was not musical like his dead namesake. Angélique kept more faithful to her violin than the others. For months on end she had a wave of enthusiasm and practised by herself. She was much more advanced than Rudi and Elisabeth and was already able to play simple sonatas. Sometimes Mama accompanied her, and recently Elisabeth had made some efforts to learn the piano, though she was mainly inspired by a sense of duty towards Angélique who did not always want to bother Mama.

Angélique had various kinds of artistic inclinations. She recited poetry very well indeed. Elisabeth, who lacked the necessary conviction to do it herself, often asked her younger sister to recite. When Angélique was certain that her parents would not arrive unexpectedly she gave way to the flattering demands of her sister. She chose for preference poems she had copied from Mama's books. Although she could not possibly have understood their full meaning she turned pale with emotion when she recited. Her sister, who was not much more mature than she, and did not understand the deeper meaning of the verses, was wonderfully moved by their warm sound and their catching rhythm. Or was she impressed by the great mysteries of life, love, and

death, of which she still knew so little, and which Angélique conjured up with the words?

Angélique drew very nicely and copied in Chinese ink the silhouettes of Fidus which had such a vogue in those years. The room of the two girls was filled with them. She painted aquarelles representing snow-covered mountains, and sometimes, at Stephan's request, scenes from the virgin forest, with tigers, serpents and Red-Indian warriors. She also ventured upon a portrait: she made a drawing from memory of Ignaz playing the zither. It showed an actual resemblance in it, but the hands looked a little queer, as though they had more than ten fingers each. Although the portrait was not perfect, Elisabeth thought that Papa and Mama might like to see it. At first Angélique was annoyed, but when Elisabeth announced that Mama also thought it a good resemblance, Angélique suddenly changed her attitude. She said she did not mind if it were shown to the model himself. He was surprised and asked whether he might keep it as a souvenir, but Angélique declared that she could do a better likeness of him if he would sit for her. Ignaz at once agreed and displayed a patience that was almost as great as his vanity. Of course, the maids wanted to look on, and Ignaz entertained them by making faces and pretending that he was a martyr. Angélique did not feel at ease with all these spectators and the drawing went wrong. She wanted to begin afresh, but Georg heard of it and thought it was enough of a good thing. If she wanted to do portraits Mama could sit for her, or Rudi, who was leaving for the cadet school in the autumn. But now that everybody took notice of it, Angélique lost her enthusiasm for portrait painting. She explained that night to Elisabeth why she would have liked to draw Ignaz. He had such beautiful strong lines in his face, and she would have liked to copy the dark glow in his eyes. Elisabeth looked somewhat astonished at her thirteen-year-old sister who grew so excited about their coachman's eyes. She suddenly felt that Papa was right and that it was as well that Angélique should choose another model.

Herr Kirschbaum was frequently ill that winter. If he dragged himself to Maria-Licht at all, though he was over sixty and only half-cured, it was because he was so keen to get a good result for Rudi's examination. In the end he gave almost exclusive attention to his show-pupil, who also took extra lessons at Klagenfurt in one or two special subjects.

Maria decided provisionally to teach Stephan herself as she had done in the case of the other children. Her first reward was a certain satisfaction in the performance of a regular task. Her zeal increased, and she began to take an interest in the work of the other children. She read their note-books and made a curious discovery. For arithmetic, geography and languages Herr Kirschbaum followed the well-

established methods from which she had benefited herself when a child. But in his teaching of history he sacrificed much, if not everything, to a strong predilection of his own. This small, industrious and tireless country teacher with his mop of grey hair that seemed always to grow over his ears and with his worn out and shiny morning-coat proved to be an enthusiastic adherent of the Austrian monarchy. In his opinion Franz-Joseph was the greatest monarch who had ever existed. Whole pages of the story he dictated were devoted to the glorious memory of Henry Jasomirgott, who made Vienna his residence and who rendered great services to the Christian religion. By the side of this imposing historical figure Julius Cæsar and Alexander shrank to the dimensions of miserable heathen adventurers whom Herr Kirschbaum overwhelmed with his contempt and to whom he hardly devoted any space. They shared their disgrace with the Corsican brigand, Napoleon, who terrorized Europe for a few years but was sent to prison as a result of the timely intervention of the Austrian armies.

Maria reproached herself for not having troubled at an earlier stage to keep an eye on her children's studies. Aunt Frieda was in the habit of hearing their lessons, but she had never noticed anything unusual. She did not remember her history so very well. Georg said he had always suspected that Herr Kirschbaum had unusual opinions, but he had never thought it mattered greatly. At the cadet school Rudi would have every opportunity to learn to assess Alexander and Napoleon at their true value. And anyhow, historical education tended to be as hyper-patriotic at the cadet school as in Herr Kirschbaum's classes. What was one to do? In France the children were taught that Alsace-Lorraine was part of the sacred soil of France, while German children learned that after 1870 it had returned to its rightful owner Germany. In half-barbaric Servia, where regicides were on the throne, teachers shamelessly told their young pupils that Austria-Hungary was governed by highway robbers who intended to deprive every small neighbour of its freedom. The result was of course that if ever a Servian were to make an attempt on the life of a Hapsburg, he could count on his Fatherland's eternal gratitude.

Rudi would therefore be able to correct his historical notions in so far as this might be necessary for an Austrian officer. For the girls Herr Kirschbaum's super-patriotic notions presented no inconvenience. But Maria wanted Stephan to be better educated. Georg's resigned meditation made her even more determined. As Georg wondered how he could find another teacher who would undertake the long journey to Maria-Licht several times a week, he felt rather guilty towards Herr Kirschbaum, whose devoted tuition would probably result in a brilliant examination in the case of Rudi. But it was the teacher himself who tactfully hinted that if Rudi were successful he was not certain of being able to continue his lessons the following

winter. He was drawing a pension now and thought seriously of retiring altogether in order to execute what had always been his great ambition: the writing of a history textbook for elementary schools. School books that were used nowadays might do just as well for Russia or Great Britain, or any other country. This seemed to him a ridiculous principle, as it was the task of history to educate youth in patriotism and loyalty to the reigning dynasty. Georg wished him success with his plan and meanwhile felt grateful that the matter was being settled so easily. He wrote at once to his friend Otto to ask his advice. Would it not be better to take a full time resident teacher? It would have to be a man with somewhat more modern views, so that Maria would approve of him.

Otto von Sterneck had retired some years earlier and had plenty of time to go into the matter. He replied that he now understood why Rudi, on a visit to Graz, had been able to tell him so precisely who were the people in the sarcophagi of the Ferdinand Mausoleum. He added that he knew just the man for whom Georg was looking and that he had written to this man advising him to apply for the post. The candidate turned out to be a nephew of Otto, the only son of his late sister who had married a German officer. A few months ago Otto had been to Munich for her funeral and there he met the young man who, though he was doing very well in the military career his father had chosen for him, was not enjoying the life. When his mother died he decided at once to doff his uniform and to study his favourite subject, the history of art. The savings he had out of his lieutenant's pay were hardly enough to keep him going for six months. There was no chance of support from his father and therefore his only hope was to get some extra earnings by giving lessons or something similar, as long as his studies lasted. Otto could not understand how one could give up the carefree existence of a young officer in order to bury oneself in books about old temples, and about Phidias, Raphael and Waldmüller. But people were not all made on one pattern and he had at once felt that there was something in this obstinate youth. His name was Paul von Brandt; he had taught himself Greek and Latin. The position Georg was now offering was the kind of thing of which he could have thought only in his wildest dreams.

The letter from the future historian arrived a day later. Georg was naturally predisposed in favour of a man so strongly recommended by his friend, and Maria was pleased with the style and the handwriting. Georg did not like procrastination and replied at once engaging Herr von Brandt for the autumn. Herr Kirschbaum's career was crowned with a supreme triumph: Rudi was second among the forty candidates who came up for the examination at Klagenfurt. Moreover he obtained special honours in history, a fact which brought tears into Herr Kirschbaum's eyes. He was unable to say a word,

and patted his pupil, already taller than himself, on the shoulder. The Major congratulated him on his splendid success and the children offered their faithful teacher a collective present, Coxe's *History of the House of Austria* in four volumes.

The new resident teacher arrived towards the end of August and all the children went to fetch him. Herr von Brandt showed no trace of the rebellious nature mentioned in Otto's letter. He was a quiet and modest young man with earnest eyes that made him look older than his years. He gave a surprised look at the four children, bursting with curiosity, who met him, their cheeks glowing from their ride. He addressed them at once as equals and did not seem to find it necessary to surround his position with awe as Herr Kirschbaum's system demanded. Of course he was much younger. Elisabeth and Angélique did not think he was more than twenty-five. Paul von Brandt looked up with surprise when he saw the children mounting their horses outside the station. He had a smile when, in order to impress him, Angélique jumped into the saddle without using the stirrup. In memory of this feat he called her "the Cossack," a title which Angélique accepted with assumed indifference.

As soon as they were home Georg told Maria how pleased he was with the new arrival. He sat down the same day to write to Otto that he liked his nephew. But after a few days his first enthusiasm cooled off a little. He was disappointed because von Brandt could not be persuaded to join the morning rides and also because he would not discuss von Tirpitz and his naval programme, the pan-Slavonic movement, and the anarchy that reigned in Russia since the loss of the war with Japan. Surely, when it was holiday for the children it was holiday for their teacher as well. But von Brandt wanted to use these last days of the vacation for his own studies. Once he went for a walk in the gloaming with Rudi and when he was back Rudi said to Elisabeth: "I wish I could get a master like that at the cadet school."

On the other hand the young teacher was sorry not to get a pupil like Rudi. He believed that notwithstanding the difference of age a friendship might have grown between them more easily than between himself and the Major, who was too much like his own father, an officer always, who looked at the world through the spectacles of his own generation.

Paul von Brandt came with the family to see Rudi off. The young man would not have dared suggest it, but he was very pleased to do so. While the family were saying their final good-bye, von Brandt kept back discreetly, but at the last moment Stephan rushed to him and asked to be lifted to the carriage door. Thus he was after all included in the final leave-taking. Stephan could not keep his eyes off Rudi's cadet school uniform, which did much honour to the military

tailor of Klagenfurt. Elisabeth was crying and Rudi tried to console her: "I shall be home before Christmas!"

She nodded and dried her tears. She was so proud because Rudi was going to be an officer. She made room for Angélique near the window of the compartment, but Angélique's kiss was rather perfunctory: she seemed hardly to be under the impression of the departure, and her smile was distant and aloof. Then Elisabeth realized what was the matter with her: she was feeling shy in the presence of Herr von Brandt. Somehow Angélique was always conscious of her public. Papa, who was travelling with Rudi, bent through the window to give a final kiss to Mama and to the children. When Stephan's turn came Elisabeth again noticed that little smile on Angélique's lips, because Herr von Brandt was holding up Stephan. **But who else was there to hold up the child? Papa also shook hands with the teacher, and then the train slowly rolled away and disappeared in the smoke behind the signal-box.**

Herr von Brandt drove back in the carriage with Mama. Elisabeth, Angélique and Stephan mounted their horses. Elisabeth would have liked to make some comment about her sister's disagreeable smile, but at the moment she felt too weak for it and she wanted to keep all her thoughts concentrated upon Rudi. It still seemed so strange and so incomprehensible that he should suddenly go and stay away for months on end. And then he would be home for a few days only. How was she going to manage without him?

Uncle Otto had asked for a photograph of Rudi in uniform and Elisabeth begged until she was given a copy to hang over her bed. As soon as they were home she was going to start writing a long letter to him.

On his way back Papa stayed a few days with Uncle Otto. Before his return a short letter from Rudi had already reached Elisabeth. During the next few months a regular correspondence began between them. Rudi described his new life at school, and told her of his first comrades, his teachers and his successes at fencing and in other sports. On her side Elisabeth gave a faithful report of everything that happened in the castle and on the farm. She told him quite a lot about Herr von Brandt, whose methods were so very different from those of Herr Kirschbaum. Although he was so busy he would go into the woods with them to look for plants and flowers for their botany lessons.

"He is incredibly clever and yet he studies all the time! It makes me giddy to think of all the things one must be able to learn in the world! He forces one to think for oneself about things, and yesterday at the arithmetic lesson he said: 'Just imagine that there might never have been a clever fellow to invent the decimal system for you. Do you realize how difficult these sums would have been?' Did you ever

think of this, Rudi? I could only wish that Angélique did not behave so queerly at the lessons. She's trying all the time to look as though what he's telling us was nothing new for her, and as though she were only present because Papa and Mama make her come. I tried to talk to her about it, but you have no idea how furious she got! Herr von Brandt has the patience of an angel in dealing with her. Usually he just pretends that he has not noticed her whims at all. . . ."

Gradually the whole family became used to leaving Elisabeth in charge of the correspondence. She transmitted messages from Papa and Mama. When she read Rudi's letters at table, it was recognised that she had the right to leave out passages that referred to things she had said herself. She kept all Rudi's letters in order and read them over from time to time. Partly in order to revenge herself upon Angélique, who had recently acquired a sketch-book which she kept hidden with a great show of mystery, Elisabeth preserved the constantly growing packet of letters in a locked drawer. But she did not persevere as long as Angélique at this little game.

At an earlier period Angélique had been uncommunicative and even hostile in her behaviour to Elisabeth. Afterwards she gave up this attitude and Elisabeth hoped that this time again the enmity would not be lasting. Angélique was shooting up very fast, her arms and her legs grew longer and longer. Her own frocks had grown too short, and when Elisabeth allowed her to use hers they never fitted properly, because Angélique seemed to have no shape at all. She was going through an unhappy period. She felt miserable, and she disliked herself and the whole world. Of course she did not fail to notice that Elisabeth was trying hard to melt the ice between them. Sometimes it gave her a malicious pleasure to pretend that they had drawn together once more, only to repel her sister unexpectedly a moment afterwards. She did not want to draw closer to her, and she did not wish anybody to interfere with her. She felt herself endowed with a wonderful capacity for hatred. When she was alone she whispered her hatred to herself: she said aloud that she hated her sister and the maids on the farm, and most of all, perhaps, this Herr von Brandt who had come into the house a few months ago and tried to capture her affection in order to make merry at her expense. Recently he had had the cheek to tell her not to dress so untidily when she came down for her lessons. As though it were his business how she dressed!

She took refuge in her room and read poetry. This opened all her wounds and increased her sense of solitude till it became almost unbearable. But it also enabled her to have a good cry, which gave her rest for a little while. She learned poems by heart, so that she might feel that they were her very own, and she recited them before the looking-glass. But she did not dare raise her voice lest anybody might be listening in the passage. She spoke the lines in a hoarse whisper,

while tears poured down her cheeks. Oh, she was not pretty when she recited! But then, was she pretty at any time? She knew that she looked impossible, and Elisabeth lent her frocks merely in order to rub it in that clothes which suited Elisabeth looked ridiculous on her.

She fetched down her violin once more and practised for weeks on end with the obstinacy of obsession. Sometimes it drove the others crazy. She tried her forces for preference with sonatas that were above her strength. Time after time she got stuck in the fast passages; she would repeat fifty times in succession, and *con forza*, a few passages which her fingers could not possibly manage with any chance of purity. Who could forbid her to study? Papa, whose notion of music in the home was a very different one, withdrew into the library where she could not be heard. Herr von Brandt's room was exactly above her own, and she knew that her practice was bound to disturb him in his studies. Let him complain!

Herr von Brandt did not complain. He pressed his hands over his ears and struggled for concentration. In calmer moments he made an effort to penetrate into the mind of this impossible child. But he was too young himself to understand this form of youthful hysteria and to work out a system of defence against it. It was clear that he was the particular butt of her persecutions. What could he have done to offend her? He continually impressed upon himself that he must be tolerant with her. He might yet win her over, he thought. Elisabeth told him that Angélique recited beautifully, and he made the mistake of asking her one day to say one of Schiller's ballads. She pressed her lips together, turned pale and looked at him with eyes glowing with hatred. He preferred not to insist and adopted the only possible alternative which was to read the poem himself. It was not easy: the dramatic intensity of this ballad did not move him as when he was a boy.

But he was acutely conscious of what he wanted. He knew that he had come to this place with a purpose, and that he must not allow his plans to be upset by a moment of anger. Also he tried to remember that after all he was only dealing with a child.

While he kept Stephan busy with a few elementary sums he tried to demolish for the benefit of the two girls the elaborate edifice erected by Herr Kirschbaum. He wanted them to see history through their own eyes, and he conjured up before them a wider world, in which the Austrian monarchy occupied no more than was its due. He showed them how the world is a live thing that continually takes new shape, and how from distant antiquity the world has undergone a strange evolution and moved via Greece, Rome, Byzantium and the Renaissance, towards an unknown future. With Elisabeth he had much success: her eyes tried to capture the vision he held out. Why did Angélique glower at the table so obstinately? Why did she oppose him when he took so much trouble? Often she succeeded in making

a lesson so exhausting that he reflected bitterly how little energy he had left for his own work.

Georg noticed that von Brandt looked frightfully pale now and then. Once more he tried to persuade him to join him and the children for the morning ride. But the young teacher declined the well-meant offer with courteous determination, and Georg was foolish enough to feel disappointed and a little hurt. How was it possible for a former officer to behave in such a way? Later on Georg decided that his judgment was at fault. Von Brandt was a Reich-German, which explained the absurd extremity of his earnestness. Those Germans knew what they wanted, but unlike Austrians, they did not know how to live. Georg forgot that he, too, had been through a period of just such solemnity of purpose, a period when he did not know how to live. He cursed the Reich-German in silence. Von Brandt was young and had no cares here! Why this terrific hurry to get his doctor's degree, which was bound to come to him sooner or later? Was it really impossible for him occasionally to spend an hour over a glass of wine, discussing the world of to-day which was after all the world in which they were living?

Rudi came home on vacation a few days before Christmas. In the course of his four months' absence he seemed to have grown taller, at any rate more manly. One would have taken him for eighteen! First of all he kissed Elisabeth and Mama. Then he took up Stephan and he had to hold off Bismark. Throughout the autumn the dog lay slumbering before the fire, but when they called out: "The master, we're going to fetch the master!" he got up and ran to the station with them. Now he jumped with his muddy feet against Rudi's beautiful uniform. It was a delightful reunion! The Major rode Rudi's stallion, Claudius, to the station, so that the boy could use his own horse on the journey home. Georg himself sat down in the carriage with Maria, and he noticed at once that Rudi no longer sat his saddle like a gentleman rider: he had adopted the rigid attitude of a cavalryman.

During the meal Rudi had, of course, to tell them his whole story. Much was already known from his letters, but every one wanted to hear it all again from his own mouth. His best friend was a young man called Arnim von Strada who had helped him over the first lonely days. They swore always to be punished together! Only a few days ago Arnim forgot to do his work, and Rudi, who had already delivered his own copy-book, had the greatest difficulty in extracting it from the pile in front of the teacher. Their lecturer in strategy, Major Wohlbruck, thought it strange that the work of the two friends should be missing at the same time. He told Rudi to open his desk, and he found the book lying right on top of everything else. "Is this a case

of higher strategy?" he asked. "Yes, Major!"—Thereupon he confined them both to their room for a week, and it was the pleasantest week they had spent at the school.

Maria was vaguely frightened as she listened to this exciting story of which she did not understand all the implications. But Georg grinned. He remembered his own time with Otto at the cadet school. "One of these days the two of you will be kicked out together," he said gruffly—"But we're on top in almost every branch, Papa! Arnim is first for gymnastics, better even than Lieutenant Berger who teaches us!"

Later, when he was alone with Elisabeth, Rudi told more about his friend. He wished she could get to know him! Rudi often read her letters to him. Arnim hoped that they would let him come and stay with them during the summer vacation. How delightful it would be! Elisabeth would love to make his acquaintance, if he really meant so much for Rudi. She also discussed the question she had often brought into her letters: would Rudi not be able to get silly Angélique to behave a little better towards Herr von Brandt? Rudi promised to do his best. But it was as though Angélique guessed that Elisabeth had sent him. She turned against her brother with the same obstinacy with which she persecuted the teacher. At the station she noticed at once how she was the last to be greeted by him. She decided to ignore him completely. In the end she was able to make him angry: he asked her whether she intended to remain a nasty unbearable creature for the rest of her existence. Whereupon she replied that it was quite likely and told him to mind his own business.

After all the things Elisabeth had told him about Angélique Rudi felt as though he were personally guilty towards Herr von Brandt. The teacher put a lot of questions about his life at school, but Rudi found it difficult to answer this genuine interest with confidences because he knew that the other man had rejected a promising military career and could obviously not like being reminded of this. The obstinate aloofness of Angélique continued to depress Rudi throughout the vacation. She even spoilt Christmas Eve for him. And when at last he entered the train for Wiener-Neustadt he gave a final reproachful look at his little sister who answered him with a sarcastic pout.

In the spring Angélique fell ill. Dr. Prisswitz diagnosed influenza and general anæmia. He advised that she should be kept lying down for a time. The warmer weather would soon be there, and her chair could then be carried out of doors. She had grown beyond her strength and wanted building up.

About this period nature startled her by an event which had occurred to Elisabeth a year before. Elisabeth hoped that this would bring them together, since she was able to reassure her younger sister in the same

way as Mama had done for her the previous winter. But Angélique kept her at a distance, and reproached her because she had kept this matter a secret from her. She felt that she had been cheated and humiliated owing to this one year's difference of age. What she liked best of all was to be by herself: there were so many things about which she wanted to think. One day Dr. Prisswitz tried to give her a thorough overhaul; she resisted with savage determination, bit him, and drove him away. He had to retreat, red, angry, and offended. He had never come across anything like this before in the course of his practice. He told her that if it were not for the sake of her parents he would certainly refuse to visit her any longer. Whereupon she replied that she had no wish to see him again.

Her father was very angry, but all he achieved was an increase of obstinacy. Mama was on the whole the person who could manage her best, but even her tactful enquiries met with a rebuff. Only, instead of replying with some rude and unrestrained remark, as she did when her father gave her a talking to, she buried her face in her pillow. There was something in Angélique which she could not express to anybody, not even towards herself. When she lay staring in front of her for hours, she asked herself whether this feeling of infinite solitude was due to the sudden loss of her twin brother. She still remembered the shattering experience when she felt as though suddenly something that was part of her own being was torn away from her, as though she was told: now you'll have to live on without it.

From that dreadful day her existence had ceased to be natural and self-evident: at intervals, sometimes even in a dream, the realization of this came to her. A few poems she had read revealed to her something of this ghost-like unreality for which she could find no words. Everything would have been so different if Stephan had continued to live. They had grown up together and there was a link between them which no stranger could ever understand. And now without any reason she was still guarding this imaginary unity between her twin-brother and herself. How could she have told any one else that she had not the power to dispose of herself? It was he who did not want it. It was he who made her laugh at the queer notion of Papa and Mama calling the little brother who arrived afterwards "Stephan." For whose benefit was this deception intended?

Now that she was ill she had plenty of time to meditate about the great trick life had played upon her. She was finding out why she hated every one around her. They had all known Stephan, and his loss meant less to them than to her. But why did she hate this German who had only arrived six months ago more than all the others together?

As she lay in the deck-chair in the sun-bathed loggia, von Brandt sometimes came to see her. He asked her whether she felt a little better: "Oh, thank you, very well." She looked at him with

impertinent hauteur. She knew very well why he came: he found it necessary for the sake of Papa and Mama to display a semblance of interest in his sick pupil. She tried to convey all this to him without words. She discussed her illness with frivolous humour, convinced that he could not look upon it in any other way: "Yes, I'll get very much behind-hand with my lessons," she said with a regret she wanted to be obviously simulated. He pretended not to see through her pretence: "I had intended to begin with Latin this month," he said, "but I shall wait till you are better."

"Oh, why not begin with Elisabeth?"

"I might, if it were not that the first elements of Latin are a little difficult."

"But I may be ill so much longer."

"I don't think so. You're looking much better already," he said, and this quiet assertion irritated her inexpressibly. She intended to remain ill for months, merely to annoy him.

But the rest cure had an effect. She began to colour again and her face became fuller. And when she shyly felt her body under the blankets, she became aware that it was growing fuller and that it was taking shape like that of Elisabeth. She secretly fondled her rising breasts, and this gave her a strange new sensation. It hurt, and at the same time it gave her a gentle excitement which roused exquisite vague longings in her. Her head became giddy as though she had taken wine. She closed her eyes to the warm sunlight and dopped into a slumber, and it was no longer as though she were here in the loggia, but out in the orchard under the white and pink trees through which the sun was shining and of which she breathed in the perfume. Everything was so quiet, and she heard nothing but a lark that was rising up with a song of triumph.

She wished she had a room to herself, so that at night she might look at her figure in the glass. Sometimes she thought of asking for one. But supposing they were to guess what she wanted it for! Did Mama and Elisabeth realize what she was feeling? Would *he* know about it? She did not dare look at him any more. But while she continued to hate him and to avert her eyes from him, there were days when, unintentionally, she allowed something gentler to pierce through, when she felt a readiness to be reconciled with a life that still held out a promise.

In a few months' time the summer vacation would be there, and Rudi was going to bring a friend from the cadet school. Angélique was curious as to what kind of a young man he would be. Mama promised to let her go to Klagenfurt to choose some new frocks as soon as she was better. Was she not better yet? She knew already what kind of frocks she wanted. She was longing to see herself in the new

clothes and to walk about in them, and Herr von Brandt would no longer be able to pass remarks about her, and Toni, who was a soldier now, but would be allowed home for the harvest, and the sons of Franz and Brigitte would look at her in the same way as they looked sometimes at Elisabeth. Not that it mattered, of course . . .

At times it was too warm already to lie in the sun. The birds had given up singing at noon. They sheltered in the foliage and slumbered on a twig. Angélique lay very still, her eyes closed, holding the copy-book with her favourite poems which she had taken out once more. How strange it seemed: it was as though these poems came to her notice for the first time. They seemed to have acquired a new significance. If she had to recite them now, she would do it very differently. Oh, she was only just beginning to understand life! These warm May evenings Ignaz played his zither outside the farm and of course all the maids clustered round him. Angélique understood many things now, more perhaps than Mama or Elisabeth guessed. Did Elisabeth understand as much as she did?

Angélique had found out a secret. Nobody appeared to be surprised that Dr. Prisswitz continued to call although all she needed now was to pick up more strength. Nor did he look so very much at her, but all the more at Elisabeth. When he came for the first time last winter, after a long absence, the first thing he did was to exclaim how much Elisabeth had grown. She was fifteen, and as tall as Mama, and if Angélique had been in her place his first glance would have revealed everything to her.

Dr. Prisswitz was in love! Although Elisabeth had not the faintest suspicion of this, Angélique was quite certain. She promised herself that she would keep her discovery entirely to herself, and that she would observe how things developed. Papa said that he thought Dr. Prisswitz might stop calling now, but at once Angélique tried to give herself a languishing air which frightened Mama. And Dr. Prisswitz was not so stupid either. He went to the library with Papa, smoked a cigar with him and discussed Bosnia, Herzegovina and the Servians of whom the papers were full. Papa would certainly miss these talks if the regular visits suddenly came to an end. When he arrived and when he left, Dr. Prisswitz never failed to take the opportunity to exchange a few words with Elisabeth. Angélique clearly saw how shy he was, although the conversation was innocent enough. One day he asked what Elisabeth was studying so diligently; she replied that she was working at her Latin verbs. Herr von Brandt had not waited with Latin after all. The doctor said that she would end by being far too learned for a girl. How old was she really?—"Fifteen, doctor."—"What, fifteen already?" Angélique joined in the conversation: "It was her birthday this month."—"This month?" He hit his forehead with his hand . . . And the same afternoon a present arrived. It was a

beautifully bound volume of Latin poems which Elisabeth was of course not yet able to read. But from the inscription at the beginning it was clear that nearly twenty years of country practice had not yet caused Dr. Prisswitz to forget his Latin. He was even able to express poetic feelings in this language. Elisabeth was a little surprised at his unexpected present and did not know how to thank him for it. Papa told her to send a nicely-worded note.

Papa and Mama were obviously purblind, but Angélique was not, and it gave her a wicked pleasure that Dr. Prisswitz understood the situation. He did not like her any the better for it. As much as her resistance when he tried to examine her, he resented the mocking glitter in her dark eyes when he had to give her a moment's professional attention.

Abel Prisswitz realized what a fool he was making of himself. But he was unable to defend himself against the wonderful, delightful confusion which this blonde girl who looked like a woman called forth in him. The limpid innocence of her blue eyes made him feel sorry for all the bad actions he had ever committed and he was sentimental enough to wonder how he might yet make good. He would see to it that she should never have the faintest inkling of his feelings. If ever she could realize the truth she would feel loathing for this family doctor who was so much older than herself. He was perfectly happy as long as he could catch a glimpse of her from time to time. No doubt time would cure him.

He knew, at any rate, why he had remained a bachelor for twenty years. It was that he might one day contemplate this exquisite creature who was not meant for him. If only he could have met such a girl when he was younger! She would have made him into the man he would so much have liked to be. She would have given him the strength and the self-respect necessary to reject the offer of his dead uncle's practice. She would have given him the power to turn a deaf ear to the laments of his aunt, who thought his desire to continue his surgical studies frivolous and irresponsible. Now he knew no other joys than reading the newspapers or having a drink.

Angélique was back at the common lessons, though she still rested during her free hours. With a little help from Herr von Brandt she gradually caught up her sister in most subjects. But she wondered how he would manage for Latin. Why should he have started on Latin with Elisabeth although he had promised to wait for her? Herr von Brandt's way out of the difficulty was to take an hour of his own precious time every day in order to coach her. This Angélique had not expected, and it gave her a slightly uncomfortable feeling.

"Can't I catch up my Latin during the lesson hour?" she said.

"No, this would hold up Elisabeth unnecessarily," he replied.

She wondered whether he was making this sacrifice only in order to humiliate her. Or did he want to show Mama and Papa what a devoted teacher he was? Perhaps they gave him extra pay for this work. This was the most satisfactory supposition and she tried therefore to make herself believe it.

Now that she was alone with him for an hour every day, she began to find it much more difficult to keep up her arrogant attitude towards him. She was not assisted by the fact that he seemed not to notice it at all, and concentrated his attention upon the subject he was teaching. She could not help it that Latin began to interest her. In order not to feel under an obligation towards him she took genuine trouble from the first lesson. He had expected much resistance on her part, and her diligence was a pleasant surprise. Was he beginning at last to win her over?

He was very careful not to betray this hope. But sometimes her rapid progress extracted an involuntary word of satisfaction from him. He loved Latin and he tried to show her the great clearness, the concise masculinity, of this dead language, which would always remain living for those who penetrated into its spirit. "No language has the educational value of Latin. It teaches one logical thinking while one constructs one's sentences. But it is precisely because with all its simplicity its structure is so ingenious that one cannot conjure away anything in Latin. That's why it was so important that you should get a thorough first grounding. Henceforth you can attend the ordinary lessons: you're up to the mark, now."

Angélique looked up with surprise. She could not suppress a spontaneous feeling of pride because she had caught up so quickly. For a moment she wondered whether she ought to thank him. But she was not able to get herself to do this. After all, he had only done his duty.

Later she felt sorry that she had not expressed her gratitude. It would have been no more than good manners required and it was not as though she would have thrown herself into his arms. But now she could not go and thank him: the right moment had passed. Then Elisabeth told her that Mama had presented him with a beautiful book full of reproductions of the works of a great Italian painter. It had not been easy to persuade him to accept this reward, although Mama knew that he had been longing to possess this book.

Well, he has been given his payment, anyhow, Angélique told herself. But she kept a feeling of guilt nevertheless. And there was something else: she missed her daily private lesson. Now Herr von Brandt could not give more attention to her than to Elisabeth or little Stephan. She saw that this was only fair, but somehow it caused her a little disappointment. She imagined that he neglected her intentionally and that he treated Elisabeth as a favourite. She tried to

recapture his interest by working very hard. But it was difficult to beat Elisabeth who seemed keen on Latin for its own sake and was reading the little Ovid Dr. Prisswitz had given her during her free hours.

Paul von Brandt observed this competition between the two sisters with astonishment. He continued to be very guarded in his relations with Angélique. While allowing himself a certain spontaneity in his dealings with Elisabeth, he preserved a safe distance between himself and her younger sister. These tactics had an unhappy result. Angélique, who at one time felt hurt by his unreflecting attempt at friendliness, could not bear his reserve now. Impulsive as she always was, she revealed the change in her attitude so frankly that he began to feel sorry for this strangely passionate and unaccountable child. Throughout the lesson she looked at his face and made desperate attempts to intercept his glance. She wore her new frocks and dressed with so much care that little Stephan thought it odd and said so.

Elisabeth was less outspoken than her brother and merely looked silently at her sister from time to time. Angélique was more closed and secretive towards her than ever. Her newest trick was to lock herself up in her room. Sometimes it was necessary for Elisabeth to knock loudly several times before she could gain admission. Thereupon she put the key in her pocket. "It's my room as well as yours, and you can't lock it against me. Do you understand?" Angélique pretended to be offended, and turned away in silence. One day, as Elisabeth entered the room, she shut her drawing-folder with a furious bang and took it to her cupboard. She did not notice that a page had dropped out. It bore the beginning of a drawing which Elisabeth recognised at a glance as a portrait of Herr von Brandt. A hopeless sense of irritation rose in her. She wanted to say something, but she found no words, and in her confusion she walked out of the room. Behind her back the little sister picked up the dropped paper with a sense of startled confusion.

Angélique wanted to help Herr von Brandt with something or other, to repay him for what he had done for her. She conceived the notion that perhaps she might be useful by copying out something for him. This would introduce her into the mysterious world of his own studies, and how it would annoy Elisabeth! The best way to arrange for this was to meet him by himself, and apparently by accident, for instance in the passage. Would she find the courage to speak at that moment? The happy opportunity for which she was waiting seemed never to present itself. One afternoon, when Elisabeth was at the farm Angélique took a desperate decision. She went upstairs to the passage outside Herr von Brandt's room. As she reached his door she realized how foolish her story would sound. For a while she stood there, unable to take a decision and waiting for her heart to beat less hard. Inside

there was a complete silence. Suddenly she heard his chair move and she rushed away in a panic. At the foot of the staircase she ran straight into Trudi, muttered an apology and rushed to her room. Trudi looked after her in wonder.

Angélique once more began to lose her looks. Her mother asked why her appetite had gone. Ought she not to get the doctor to call again? "No, certainly not!" said Angélique, so abruptly that her father looked up with a frown from behind his newspaper.

During the lessons, notwithstanding her obvious fatigue, Angélique seemed all attention. But if Herr von Brandt put a question to her she was completely at a loss. Elisabeth seemed hardly surprised by this, and looked straight in front of her, if Herr von Brandt chanced to send her a questioning glance, as if asking for an explanation of her sister's behaviour.

Elisabeth was in the habit of going for long walks by herself. Sometimes she took Stephan with her. One day, when she had already gone out by herself, she changed her mind and returned in order to fetch him. She met Trudi, who had a queer expression in her eyes: "Miss Elisabeth," she said, "I don't want to meddle with what is no concern of mine, but do you know that Angélique is alone with Herr von Brandt in his room?"

Elisabeth stared at her. Her first reaction was a feeling of repulsion towards Trudi, whose voice so clearly revealed an unpleasant excitement. Of course Elisabeth was still half a child, like her younger sister, but she knew very well that Angélique ought not to do such a thing. Nor should Herr von Brandt have allowed it. Recently at the farm Elisabeth had heard remarks that were not intended for her ears, but which now acquired a sudden significance. She felt responsible for her younger sister, and at the same time she was full of contempt for Trudi. These sentiments enabled her to recover her usual assurance, and even her sense of superiority: "Well, and what about it?" she said. "Why are you spying here? What do you imagine you're going to find out? Does it matter if she is with Herr von Brandt? She has not yet shown him her home-work. I'm going there myself, as a matter of fact."

She tried to pass on, but Trudi followed her and said in a voice that was full of resentment: "But she goes upstairs every day! And always when you are away. She waits for you to go. . . ."

Elisabeth turned round, pale with anger and horror. "Hold your tongue," she said. Trudi muttered something about merely trying to be helpful. Meanwhile Elisabeth was slowly going up the steps, with a feeling of giddiness. Trudi's parting words caused the blood to rush away from her head. It was as though she suddenly looked into a precipice. Could there really be something dreadful about all this? Had her parents made a mistake in trusting Herr von Brandt? Papa,

Mama and even Rudi! She must not stand here. Perhaps Trudi was listening downstairs. She wanted to collect herself, but her thoughts refused to move. She must act at once: every second of uncertainty was an intolerable torture. Oh, if only Rudi had been here! But her young sister was concerned and she must take action on her own responsibility. Holding her head very straight, she walked towards Herr von Brandt's room.

The door banged against the back of Angélique, who was standing just inside. She turned round in surprise and muttered something like: "Yes, I'll be down at once." She seemed utterly out of countenance. In the chair by his writing-table sat Herr von Brandt looking at the two of them with surprise. "What are you doing here, Elisabeth?" She heard the suppressed anger in his cool voice and she realized that she had blundered. "Were you looking for something here?" She nodded, her lips were trembling. "Yes, sir, I came to look for Angélique."

"I have an idea that she rather intended to leave of her own accord," he said. "And as far as you are concerned, you will oblige me by knocking at the door in future. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you can both go now." He turned towards his writing-desk and both girls went away, feeling very small.

In the passage Angélique was unable to control herself any longer. She sobbed. "Shut up!" Elisabeth ordered her, thinking of Trudi. But the maid was nowhere to be seen. Elisabeth pushed her sister in front of her into the room.

"Why did you do that?" she asked as soon as they were alone. "Don't you understand such a thing isn't done?"

Angélique shrank away from her. "That's what he told me, too, but I really didn't know!"

"And all the other occasions, then, each time I wasn't there! What did you do then?"

Angélique turned her tear-stained face indignantly towards her.

"Nothing! It's the first time I've been to his room. I've wanted to, ever so often, but I didn't dare. If anybody said I went it's a lie!"

"All the better," sighed Elisabeth. "But then you were lying when you said that you didn't know it wasn't done!"

Angélique made no reply. She dried her tears. "Are you going to tell Papa and Mama now?" she asked at last.

"Is that all you're worrying about?" Elisabeth asked in reply. "Don't you mind at all what he is thinking of you? Of you, and of me too?" she added in a dull tone, while her sister looked sulkily away. And she was thinking of Trudi also. "If only this could remain between the two of us!"

Angélique took notice once more. "Oh, Trudi has been spying of course! She's in love with him herself!"

Elisabeth was startled by the way Angélique spoke these words. "What are you talking about, in love. . . !"

Angélique did not deem it worth while to answer this question. She tried to intimidate Elisabeth by looking in front of her with an air of aloofness, as though she were the elder of the two. "Trudi has run after him from the beginning. Just as Mariedl runs after Ignaz and just as . . . Oh, but of course, you don't even know who is in love with you!"

Elisabeth looked in astonishment at her younger sister: what other startling revelations were going to come this afternoon? "Who is in love with me?" she asked. Something inside her warned her that Angélique would perhaps have the temerity to mention Herr von Brandt: one could expect anything from this child. "Oh, don't!" she exclaimed angrily, trying to prevent her sister from going on. "I don't want to hear it at all!"

But Angélique was too quick: "Dr. Prisswitz!"

"Now I've had enough of it," said Elisabeth. She felt as though she were choking. She was longing for fresh air. She went out for a long lonely walk through the woods, and by the time she came back for dinner she had not yet entirely mastered her emotions. During the meal she could not bring herself to look at her younger sister. She found it infinitely painful to sit by the side of Herr von Brandt. But it was as though he knew this and wanted to help her. He was more friendly and attentive than usual, and seemed determined to forget all about this afternoon. In consequence Elisabeth gave up her previous intention of apologizing for the affair: there was no need.

Nevertheless the event left sufficiently unpleasant traces. Trudi had a way of looking as though to say, "You see how right I was!" It was all the fault of Angélique, who wrapped herself in a cloud of grief. But Elisabeth saw nothing in this attitude apart from pretence and hurt vanity. And now she dreaded the thought of Dr. Prisswitz's next visit. Apart from Angélique nobody could understand why threats were needed before she could be persuaded to come and greet him in the library where he was drinking a glass of Tokay with Papa. He jumped up with an air of pleasure when she entered, but perhaps he guessed something from her attitude. After he had left the Major noticed with wonder that his glass was still half-full. And after this visit Dr. Prisswitz did not return. Georg kept saying to Maria that he did not understand why the doctor kept away till, in a guarded moment, she remarked that perhaps Elisabeth had been teased a little because of the attentions the doctor paid her. Angélique obviously was not the only one who noticed things. At first Georg was dumbfounded; then he got up in a fury: he wanted to ride at once to Klagenfurt to tell the poor doctor what he thought of him. Maria regretted her slip

and had to use all her influence to hold him back and to convince him of the innocent nature of this courtship.

All this unpleasantness made Elisabeth long for Rudi's return. Happily it was drawing so near that she could count the days. Herr von Brandt would have to go to Munich for his first examination, after which he intended to go to Rome, where he could study and visit museums. Elisabeth hoped that his absence would be long enough for Angélique to come back to her senses.

The tension was a little released when Trudi gave notice. She intended to go to Vienna. Not, she assured Anna, in order to look for Joseph. Joseph was dead for her, but she had a cousin who offered her a good position. Anna asked: "And aren't you afraid of going to such a big city all by yourself?"

"Of course not!" said Trudi. "What would Trudi have to be afraid of?" She used to say this to Joseph when he was fooling and telling her that he would take her away to Vienna. No, she was glad to go, because she found it impossible for her to stay here any longer. The maids on the farm, the two young ladies and their teacher, all treated her like dirt. She would be happier with her cousin. Where could one be better than among one's own relations? And there would be enough to do for her, with seven children in the house. She would have no time to worry about her own affairs. And so, thought Anna, Trudi was after all going to see Vienna, that city for which her husband had deserted her and her unborn child.

CHAPTER TEN

LONELINESS

TOWARDS the end of July, the day after Herr von Brandt's departure for Munich, Rudi arrived accompanied by Arnim von Strada. He was prouder of his friend than of the brilliant report on his year's work and, within an hour of his arrival, Arnim had gained every heart. In many respects the two boys formed a complete contrast. Rudi was quiet and earnest, while Arnim was a bright Viennese youngster who could not take anything entirely seriously, though, for Rudi's sake, he sometimes tried. But Rudi was the last to make demands on him, and his attitude was one of continual adoration for the sunny and light-hearted aspects of Arnim's character. He listened with an enraptured smile to the airy, topsy-turvy talk of his friend, but at the same time he watched rather anxiously to see how his relations would take it. There was no need to worry. They were all delighted. Arnim's admiration for Rudi was less obvious but just as unlimited. One day he told Elisabeth how much he admired her brother, and he grew quite sad as he compared himself to his friend, till he realized, all of a sudden, how funny this was, and burst out laughing. "Yes, there's no one else at school like him. Can you understand how he can want to be my friend? Seriously, he could pick up twenty as good as me."

If Arnim had not yet conquered Elisabeth's affection, he would have done so by these words. She tried to show that he was not doing himself justice: "Rudi is always telling me that he has never met any one like you!"

"Why! If you came to Vienna you'd soon find out that we're all made on the same pattern there. But a chap like Rudi. . . !"

Rudi shared his bedroom with his friend. When they went upstairs the first evening, he asked what Arnim thought of his sister.

"Which one do you mean?" asked Arnim, gazing from his bed through the open window at the starry sky over the woods.

"Elisabeth, of course!" said Rudi who could not understand how his friend could have a moment's doubt as to whom he meant.

"Elisabeth. . ." said Arnim meditatively. "She's exactly like you. I'm just the slightest bit afraid of her."

"Afraid!"

Arnim sighed. "You won't understand, of course. But when she looks at me she gives me twinges of conscience, even though I don't remember at the time whether I've done anything wrong. She reminds

me of all the sins I've left behind me, and of those I'm still sure to commit. For her sake I'd like to be better than I am, and that, of course, is simply impossible."

Rudi preferred not to answer. He knew Arnim's tendency to speak ill of himself. Usually Rudi took Arnim's defence against himself, but this time he was a little annoyed. He showed it with a slightly resentful smile.

Arnim did not mind in the least. "But I say, that sister of yours is a good looker!" And then, with a tone of contempt: "But of course you're her brother and you don't notice it at all!"

"I know she isn't plain," said Rudi.

Arnim turned towards him with a scrutinizing look. "I'll be interested to see what you think of my sisters when you come to stay with us next summer. I must confess that I don't see anything in them myself."

As Rudi remained silent, Arnim was at last able to concentrate his thoughts on something else, on Angélique, the younger sister of whom his friend had hardly ever spoken. She seemed a little rascal, with her dark eyes and her challenging laughter. At dinner she had looked at him once or twice in such a curious way. Of course, Arnim wanted to behave sensibly. He was seventeen, and at Budapest he had lived through a wild adventure last summer with his cousin Barbara, when he was staying with her parents. He still felt afraid when he thought of it. It all began as a game, but later it was misery. Long after he had ceased to think of her she continued to write him the maddest letters, and of course he lost one of them and the rector found it. The rector sent it on to his father and Arnim did not want to live again through what followed. It would be dreadful if such a thing happened with a sister of Rudi. No, he had learned already that one ought to be careful with girls. If necessary, he would say to Angélique: "Little girl, I might be your father."

What was so irritating was that there was something playing round her mouth that seemed to say that she was perfectly aware what kind of a fellow he was. That he simply could not bear. She made him feel his own weakness, which was just the thing to destroy all his good intentions.

He sighed and chose to think only of what was pleasant: of the attractive sparkle in a pair of young, dark eyes. While Rudi was still lying awake wondering how to cure him of his silly sense of inferiority, Arnim, however displeased with himself, had already found oblivion in sleep.

The children helped to gather in the harvest. Arnim stood in the broiling sun on top of the cart, stamping down the sheaves, and he kept the farm hands and the maids laughing with his running commen-

tary. They all knew him well by now. They talked to him as though they had worked for his grandfather. Every girl had a smile for him and a fire of back-chat. Elisabeth had never seen them so familiar.

Rudi had not exaggerated when he praised his friend's gymnastic talents. Arnim also had a fast swimming stroke and it was only in long distance competitions that Rudi's staying power defeated him. He disregarded Elisabeth's anxious warning, climbed a tall tree by the side of the lake, and dived from it. He surprised his horse by doing Cossack tricks as he rode it, and in the castle he did mountaineering feats along the façade. One early morning when every one was still asleep, he climbed up and drew a double-crowned eagle in charcoal just underneath the roof. He refused to reveal the way he had followed, but he assured them that he had not used a ladder and they all knew that he must be believed. The glory of this eagle, drawn as it were in flight, was of short duration. The following day there was a thunderstorm followed by a miniature cloudburst which washed out the drawing completely.

It happened to be Aunt Frieda's birthday. The children had hoped to treat her to a drive through the woods, a thing she always enjoyed. But the roads had been converted into mud pools and a more modest expedition was at once improvised. Aunt Frieda was placed in Aunt Ottilie's old bath-chair, which Arnim had adorned with flowers. He rolled it to the door, knocked at her room and announced solemnly: "Your cab is ready!" And there she sat, whether she wanted it or not, while the children shouted and drove her to the dining-room, where her own chair was similarly ornamented.

But they found Mama crying with her head on Papa's shoulder. A telegram was on the table. Grandmama had just died. She never meant much to the children and Stephan had not even met her. But the birthday party broke up nevertheless. Arnim found himself suddenly a stranger in this circle, standing there in an attitude of courteous sympathy. He looked out for an appropriate opportunity to disappear, taking with him the flowery chair which, though he did not know it, had at one time been used by the deceased.

It was necessary to act at once. Papa and Mama were to leave for Graz by the midday train. Could they allow Rudi and Elisabeth, the eldest grandson and granddaughter, to be absent from the funeral? Papa considered they ought to go, and Mama did not really know what she preferred them to do. She would have liked to take Stephan with her because she did not dare leave him unsupervised for a whole week in the company of a dangerous acrobat. On the other hand it would hardly do to take a seven-year-old child to the house of a dead person. She told Aunt Frieda so often that she was not to leave the child alone with Arnim for one minute that at last the old lady was almost annoyed. But Aunt Frieda never was quite irritated. "I'll look after

him faithfully, and I'll take him in bed with me at night," she promised. She did not even mind that her birthday had been spoilt. "I've had my little ride!" she chuckled afterwards. After the departure of the parents no trace remained of any sense of loss. Grandmama was one of the few people for whom Aunt Frieda never felt much sympathy.

Rudi felt a little awkward at having to leave his friend like this. He felt sorrier about this than about Grandmama's death and at the station he apologized once more. But Arnim proved very broadminded in such matters: "Of course it's unpleasant for you, old chap, but you can't help it, can you? The same thing may happen next year when you come to stay with us! But I don't expect it; ours is a tough one, says Papa. . . ."

Maria was mistaken when she feared that Arnim would have a bad influence on Stephan. On the contrary it was Arnim who taught him the first elements of carefulness, and of this Stephan was in great need. He taught him to stand on his hands, to make long-distance jumps and high jumps, but the first time he caught Stephan doing something dangerous, he addressed him with deep contempt: "Look here! If you're such a fool that you can't look after yourself, I'm through with you! Do you imagine that I'd ever do a thing without first looking whether I might by chance risk my neck? Your mother would love me, wouldn't she, if she came back to find you in bed with a broken arm! If that's your ambition, go ahead by all means. But by yourself, if you don't mind." This short address made more impression upon the little sportsman than all the anxious supplications and warnings of his mother in the course of seven years.

As a matter of fact there were certain aspects of life with which Arnim had not dealt in the same prudent way. One day when he happened to be alone with Angélinque, he drew her towards him and kissed her. He had known for days that it would come to this, and she obviously was leading up to it. Even so her reaction startled him. For a moment she was rigid and unwilling in his arms, and he thought he had made a mistake. But when he asked her whether she minded, as one should after all do after the first kiss, she turned her half-open lips towards him. Her eyes looked at him with a helpless anxiety that made him aware of his full responsibility. It was lucky the others were just arriving in the passage. Since then they had not been alone for a moment and Arnim was rather pleased that Rudi stuck to him the whole day.

But now he was alone with her and with little Stephan.

The morning after the thunder-storm the sun reappeared and the three of them rode along the stubbled fields from which the heat rose damp and scented. Angélique said that after the rain there were bound to be large sweet blackberries and that they ought to pick some for Aunt Frieda. Stephan at once dismounted and Angélique followed

his example. The shallow ditches along the edge of the wood were full of blackberries and Stephan ran ahead excitedly in order to pick the best. Angélique took no pains to beat him, she stayed behind with Arnim waiting for the opportunity to put her arms round him behind the protection of the undergrowth. She kissed him with all her pent-up passion and whispered to him that she had loved him from the moment she saw him step out of the train with Rudi. But he was not to tell Rudi and he was to be particularly careful lest Elisabeth should know. She made him swear that he would never tell any one in the world! She made him seal his oath with new kisses which she received as if in a trance. She shut her eyes and hung limp in his arms, forgetting Stephan's existence so completely that she suggested in a hoarse whisper that they should sit down together on the moss. Although he was only seventeen and his knowledge of love scant, Arnim felt that she was drawing him into an abyss. He objected that the moss was still too damp for them to sit on, but she shook her dark hair and obstinately repeated: "What does it matter!" Thank goodness Stephan arrived at that moment, his handkerchief full of splendid large berries; Arnim still felt giddy in the head but Angélique had already recovered her self-possession and was bending admiringly over the brambles. She picked out a dark one and suddenly pressed it into his mouth. She took one too and gave him a naughty smile. He admired her virtuosity, but reflected that he was only just beginning to find out what a baggage she was. She could have taught a thing or two even to Barbara.

Aunt Frieda had not the slightest suspicion and left them entirely to themselves. She looked after Stephan as she had been told to do. That evening she took him upstairs and Angélique and Arnim were left alone in the music-room. Angélique seemed to have no intention of making love. She sank into the easy chair where her mother usually sat, and asked him to play something from *die Fledermaus*. Arnim knew by heart a whole repertory of passages from opera. He played by ear and amused every one in the house by the way he whistled and declaimed as he strummed away. Angélique appeared to want no more than that he should entertain her. He forgot his confusion at being alone with her and he played and sang with gusto. Meanwhile she rose from her chair and approached him from behind. Suddenly she put her arms round his neck and kissed him on the mouth. He thought no more of Strauss, but drew her on to his knee, kissed her and whispered words of love till he forgot what he was doing. With trembling hand he began to stroke her cheeks, her shoulders. Suddenly, with a suppressed cry, beneath her blouse he discovered the shape of her breasts. She shivered, but did not resist. He was in a trance, but he had a vague feeling that encouragement to further enterprise was not lacking. Did she herself open her blouse a little? His hand sank

into the warm softness of the undisclosed mystery. He stroked her breast as though all this had long existed between them. He could feel the beats of her heart beneath her hot skin. He would have liked to tell her his overwhelming joy, and the sweetness of this moment, but he found no words for his happiness. Perhaps she understood him even so. She sank entirely over him and, with her head hidden in his shoulder, she seemed hardly to realize how, in an onrush of desire, his hand moved down along her body. Suddenly she was startled and yet seemed to fight desperately against the fear that was in her. She pressed herself against him even more ardently. Everything trembled and turned red before his eyes. He bent forward, and slowly Angélique dropped on to the carpet. With a wild look in her startled eyes, she moaned: "Don't . . . don't." He looked at her, and wondered whether he should answer her supplication or press down her arm that was only weakly resisting . . .

"Look out, Aunt Frieda!" They both jumped up. While she tried to arrange her hair with somewhat unsteady hand he helped her to arrange her dress. Their common guilt suddenly established a complete familiarity between them.

"Did you hear something?" he stammered.

"I don't know . . ." She seemed sorry now that she had reminded him of Aunt Frieda's existence. She came nearer, her eyes on his own. "Arnim . . . When they have gone to bed . . . Will you come to me then? In my room . . . We'll be alone. Quite alone . . ."

He gave no reply. A pained astonishment, something like grief, appeared in her eyes. "Won't you?"

"But we mustn't do such a thing!" he said and he had to control the trembling of his mouth.

She wanted to say something else, but now light footsteps were really drawing nearer in the passage. "Yes, play some more," said Aunt Frieda who had caught distant sounds of *die Fledermaus*. Arnim was glad to be able to turn towards the instrument. While his thoughts tried to escape from the labyrinth of his blood, he played the notes, that were stored in his memory in the shape of melodies and harmonies. Aunt Frieda was pleased and took up her crochet work, while Angélique hid her face behind the book that was lying on the table. When she put it down to go to bed she would have been unable to say whether it was a novel or a volume of poetry.

She undressed hastily and took refuge in her bed. There she lay waiting, breathless with excitement. The moon was shining through the tall open window and the whole room was filled with a ghostly light. Through the whispering silence of the night she heard the clock downstairs boom several times; she tried to count, but half-way through she had forgotten the number of strokes. A moment ago she heard Arnim's door. Then Aunt Frieda's. It was always a long time

before Aunt Frieda actually went to bed and fell asleep. Nobody knew what she did after she retired. Perhaps she tidied up a little and read old letters.

For a long time Angélique heard nothing more in the house. From outside came the sounds of the summer's night. The warning cry of an owl in the misty wood . . . Was that a cart returning to the farm? Again a clock struck, only once . . . Why did Arnim not come? Was he afraid? Bitter disappointment suddenly brought the tears in her eyes. If she dared, why should not he? It was mean of him to keep her waiting here. Now that they had gone so far, she wanted to get to know the whole great mystery. She had ventured out with him into the storm and now she was waiting to be struck by the lightning. Nothing mattered. She did not mind. The day after to-morrow Elisabeth would be back. She would no longer be alone. Arnim . . . She whispered his name. The moon, which had thrown its light upon the floor and the dressing-table, was slowly creeping up the chair where her clothes lay. In a moment the bluish light would begin to spread over her bed. She threw away the blankets, and lay naked under the sheet. She imagined how he would lie down by her side, and she felt his strong young arms round her shoulder. Her dry lips waited for the liberation of his kiss; her body, which she still did not know herself, was waiting hungrily.

The following morning Angélique did not feel well; she stayed in bed till Aunt Frieda came to see her. Aunt Frieda, of course, agreed at once that she should stay in bed if she felt like it. She took up some breakfast for her and asked what she would like for lunch. Angélique replied that she did not expect to be hungry. Arnim was startled when he heard that Angélique was unwell. "But I think you might go and see her presently, I'll ask her," said Aunt Frieda. It was with some difficulty that he convinced her that it might be better not to disturb Angélique.

They only met the next day when it was time to fetch Rudi from the train. He met her with a feeling of guilt, but she looked the other way and did not even answer his greeting. When he saw how ridiculously she was behaving he began almost to feel sorry for her. What need was there for pretence towards him? How much nicer he would have thought her if she had behaved normally and helped him forget everything as soon as possible. He was glad to escape from her during the exchange of greetings at the station.

The same afternoon Georg went for a ride with his children. He felt a need to stretch out and to forget about the funeral. At Graz he had heard much talk about the political crisis brought about by the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and he wanted now to hear the views of his son and of Arnim. Of course little else had been

talked about during the last term at the cadet school save the possibility of a conflict with Servia. Would Servia be able to count on the support of its silent protector Russia? Georg doubted it, because in 1905 Japan had given her a sharp lesson, which was still too fresh in Russia's memory: she could hardly wish for new adventures yet. Moreover, the annexation of these two half-wild regions was, in the opinion of the world, a right amply earned by Austria after all she had done for them in the course of the last thirty years. The two boys were not so certain of this as the old Major. It was said in their school that Russia was arming feverishly, and notwithstanding Herr Kirschbaum's lessons, Rudi proved no longer to be so absolutely sure that the monarchy and the Emperor were inevitably right in anything they undertook. This younger generation seemed to be critical even of itself; it had more respect for reason than for instinct. Arnim tried to uphold his views against those of the Major, but never forgot to take the edge of the conflict by his tactful words. This, however, only made Georg more conscious of the existing contrast. Why did Rudi say so little? Did he agree with the views his friend presented in this light-hearted and almost cynical fashion? Had one year at the school already re-shaped his mind to such an extent? Georg wondered what support the monarchy would get from officers who, in the midst of this passionate national excitement, could remain cool and doubtful of their own right. As far as Rudi was concerned he felt that there was no need to worry: if ever the situation became serious he would give up thinking and fight for his Emperor. God grant that it might never become necessary.

A few days later Rudi and his friend had to return to school. Arnim and Angélique had not exchanged a word, and the difficult relationship between them gradually became just tolerable. Sometimes Arnim felt as though nothing had happened. It was only towards the end that Angélique tried to restore something like a silent understanding between them. As there seemed little danger at this stage, he joined in her game, but took great care that no one noticed anything.

At their departure the two boys wore their corporal's uniforms for the first time. Georg, who had been completely indifferent in the past whether he would get on his collar the stars of a Major or a Colonel, was as proud as anything about these corporal's stripes. He looked sideways to make sure that the station-master noticed them.

The two cadets left a great void behind them in the castle. The family missed Rudi, but they also missed the light-hearted nonsense of Arnim and his songs at the piano. For a while neither Maria nor Elisabeth had the courage to play. The Major withdrew into his library and waited for the first letter from Wiener-Neustadt.

Bismark walked aimless and unhappy through the house, and at

last he lay down in his basket, not to get up again. His appetite had gone, he sniffed at his food and refused it. When the veterinary surgeon came he told them, as they feared he would, that this had been Bismark's last summer. The dog grew thinner and thinner, and when Elisabeth gently stroked his head he moaned softly, as though he felt his end drawing near. Although the nights were not yet cold he was wrapped up very carefully every evening, but he lay shivering even under his flannel blanket. And one morning that autumn they found him dead. Bismark was only a dog, but they had all known him so well and Elisabeth shed hot tears for him. Georg told Ignaz to bury the dog in the courtyard and sat down to write the news to Rudi himself:

Elisabeth often wondered how Herr von Brandt was getting on in Italy. Once the two boys had gone, she began to long for her lessons, and also for the return of her teacher. There had been news from him only once: a post card from Rome. No word about himself, and not even about the result of his examination! She would have liked to know how many more there would be, and how long he was still to remain with them at Maria-Licht. In anticipation of his return she fetched out her books and began to do themes and to translate Ovid for her own pleasure. He had not informed them of the precise time of his arrival, and unexpectedly a cab drew up before the gate and he stepped out smiling at the familiar faces. "Herr von Brandt!" shouted Stephan, rushing down the stairs. Elisabeth felt excited as she followed him. Von Brandt was burnt by the Italian sun and something of the southern light seemed to have remained in his eyes. When he left they looked dull and tired and now they were merry and sparkling.

"Well, well, the good lazy days are over for you!" he said with a grin after he had settled with the cab driver. There was no doubt that his holiday had done him good. Elisabeth noticed it at once. How had he spent his days? She could not picture him otherwise than lost in his studies. But he could not possibly have stayed indoors in the libraries and museums of Rome all the time. He did not look as if he had. Perhaps he went for long walks to famous monuments, and wandered about the town. No one would know how good-tempered and boyish he was during his vacation. She got the impression, however, from the first words he spoke on arriving home. How pleasant if he had always lived in the neighbourhood and if they had known him personally instead of only as a teacher.

After a few days his colour began to leave him once more and his face was sterner than suited his young years. Elisabeth felt almost irritated: why must he sit and study for ever? What was it that drove him on? Was he working so hard merely in order to get away as soon as possible? Did he want to be old before his time?

Sometimes she felt rebellious: she would not follow him blindly, and she neglected her work so thoroughly that there were less mistakes in Angélique's Latin themes than in hers. The teacher looked at her searchingly and she met his glance with a kind of pride. But he was wise enough not to ask questions. One day he became communicative, and for the first time told them of the things he had seen in Italy. He showed them photographs and books, and conjured up some of the greatness of the Roman world that had now disappeared. In this way he soon rekindled Elisabeth's interest in her studies. Latin would open this world to her! Oh, with him for guide Elisabeth would have loved to see the Forum and the Palatine Hill, the triumphal arches of Titus and Constantine, and the mighty structures erected under the Emperor Caracalla, which still formed part of the eternal and indestructible Roman landscape. What an exquisite country Italy must be, with its grand monuments, and all about them music and dancing and the southern delight in life. There the sun shone in a perpetually blue sky, while here winter was drawing near and sombre grey rain-clouds drifted over the woods. Here it was rain, rain every day; the road to Seekirchen was almost impassable. Eisengruber had to harness two horses to his cart if he did not want to get stuck half-way.

One day Elisabeth gave way to an impulse. She did so want to know whether Herr von Brandt had been successful at his examination in Munich. If he had been, he would have to be congratulated, because otherwise it would appear as if no one here were interested in him. "You never wrote how you did at Munich," she said.—"Did you know then that I was going to take an examination?" he asked. She fancied that he was making fun of her and an angry blush rose on her face. "Mama told me," she said with assumed indifference, turning away her face.—"Well, it went off all right," he said in an even tone, and at once went on with the lesson. The whole day Elisabeth was angry with him and with herself. Why did he still treat her as a child? Was she still a child?

Rudi came over for a Christmas vacation, and Angélique did not know whether to feel relieved or disappointed because his friend was not with him. Arnim would have liked to take him to Vienna but this was impossible because Rudi's birthday was on Christmas Day, and the whole family would have been too disappointed to be without him. The affectionate friendship which had arisen between Rudi and Herr von Brandt developed during this Christmas vacation. The young teacher always found it possible to make himself free for a walk with Rudi. Georg noticed it with something almost like envy. Sometimes he felt that Rudi liked walking with von Brandt better than exchanging views with his father. Of course the boy must know his own mind and Georg was not going to betray his disappointment. For months now he had been longing for his son's return and for the few

days they would spend together. But he consoled himself as usual. Life seemed determined to take from him all but his pride, and he would have to be satisfied with his share. In his moments of black depression he fancied that Rudi listened to him merely for the sake of politeness. If this were the case, he was perfectly ready to let him off.

As in his former days of loneliness he went for solace to his books. What else was there left for him? There was nothing to do on the land, over which the snow lay thickly. But it was as though he could read no longer. He merely saw words appearing vaguely before his eyes, and what was the use of words? He was sixty-seven: too old to get new notions from words.

Franz told him that there was much game in the woods this winter. It would have been possible to go shooting, but he knew that Rudi did not like it, and there was little pleasure in going by himself. Rudi was almost too soft for a man, and in that respect at any rate a military career did not suit him. It was not that if the need arose he would be less brave than his comrades. On the contrary, perhaps. But his first battle would give him a shock that would never be entirely overcome. As long as nothing took place in Europe all this did not matter much, because an officer's career remained a game. Somehow Georg was no longer able to believe in a war. He felt that from that point of view something was changed in the world. In the days when he was a young subaltern the conflict about Servia would certainly have led to war. But then war was a great exciting venture for which the whole army was secretly longing. Now the fight was no longer between standing armies but between whole populations, and war was no longer an adventure with even chances of winning and losing. It would be an immense tragedy, and as people realized this they did not want to go beyond threats. The army was the mailed fist one lifted in order to make an impression, while one took good care not to hit out with it. Germany was building a fleet in order to break British arrogance, not in order to send it out to fight. How many years had people talked about the coming Anglo-Russian war? All the cleverest heads in the world had proved that it was inevitable because of the clash of both Empires in Asia. And what had come instead? A treaty, which was immeasurably cheaper than war. No, Rudi could wear his uniform without worrying, he could serve the Emperor as an Austrian cavalry officer for some ten carefree years. Then his presence here at Maria-Licht would become necessary.

What way would Stephan go in later years? Georg refused to give the matter a thought. Stephan belonged to Maria: this had been agreed upon from the beginning. He wondered whether she still clung to her idea of making him a priest. Perhaps she had already realized her mistake. Father Aigner, whom she had called in as an ally,

looked as though he opposed her plans. Why did she not turn to her husband now that she was so lonely? Of course, she would not appeal to him, if she wanted to compel their boy to do something for which he felt no calling. But what she could ask for was for support in her great need, in her growing uncertainty and despair. Georg could not take the first step: he had to respect the silent agreement made at the birth of Stephan. But why did she not come to him? He was perfectly ready to leave the child entirely to her, if only she would return to him.

Throughout the winter these sterile thoughts ran through Georg's head. Only with the arrival of spring did his depression lift a little. At least, he could ride out once more and supervise the work in the fields. About Easter Rudi came home unexpectedly for a few days: he had been ill at school and was sent home to recover. No one had heard of it at home, only Elisabeth had been struck by the greater interval between his letters. Rudi merely told her that he was so busy with his end-of-term work. He was afraid that Mama would worry and he preferred even now to pretend that there had been nothing the matter with him. But he still bore the traces of his illness, and he brought with him books full of notes which had to be copied. Of course Elisabeth did the copying for him; she wondered at the incredible difficulty of the things Rudi had to learn. He had to reckon out, for instance, where cannon-balls would arrive if the strength of the wind, from such and such a quarter were . . . "Yes, of course," said Rudi with a laugh, "you just think, it's either a hit or a miss."—"No, but I thought that you people just pointed the gun."—"And what if we can't see one another at all?" Elisabeth looked at her brother with a helpless face and added: "I think it abominable, that one should shoot at people one can't even see."—"The enemy does the same thing to us," said Rudi by way of explanation.

Georg, standing behind his boy, placed his heavy arm protectingly over his shoulder. "There is no enemy now. There used to be, but human beings won't go to war any more."

"Why does one become an officer then?"

"In order to have manœuvres along the frontier," said Georg with a good-tempered laugh. "It's the modern way of waging war, it's painless and it achieves the same results."

This sounded reassuring to Elisabeth. "And on the Emperor's birthday one has to have parades!" she said. To do full justice to her joke Rudi pretended to be upset, but she knew him much too well. "My brother, the parade corporal," she called him henceforth.

In the summer Rudi went to stay with Arnim. His absence was painful enough to Elisabeth, but she waited in vain for the long descriptions he had promised to send her from Vienna. She had to be

satisfied with quickly scribbled picture post cards, on which he promised to tell her later about the splendid time he was having. At present, he said, his impressions were too overwhelming. He declared that Vienna was the finest city in the world, although as a matter of fact the only other ones he knew were Graz and Klagenfurt. Arnim's relatives were the nicest people he had ever met. Arnim had two nice young sisters and he had been dancing with one of them. (Elisabeth did not even know he could dance!) She was called Vera, and Elisabeth must make her acquaintance as soon as possible. They had been to the Prater and to the Wienerwald; they had also been to the bioscope where they saw Max Linder. And after a week they went to the country house of the von Stradas from where they would return on the 18th of August to be present at the Emperor's parade. This parade promised to be the high mark of the vacation. Rudi wrote about it with excitement and when at last it had taken place he found it difficult to express his emotion in words. He had seen the old Emperor with his own eyes, in the saddle although he was seventy-nine, and tears poured down his cheeks when the impressive grey figure on horseback slowly rode along the front of the troops. He shouted hurrah with all the other spectators, and with a shiver of awe he was aware of the greatness of the monarchy. What a splendid sight it had been! All these resplendent white uniforms in the bright sun, the brass bands, the roll of the drums, the booming words of command. Then there were the many mottled squadrons of cavalry, lancers with their gay little flags, Hungarians with expensive dolmans, and the artillery with their rattling, jumping, pieces on which the men could hardly keep their seats when the horses took a sudden turn at the gallop. Then there was the march past of the old Imperial regiments with their torn, faded and glorious colours. Oh, Austria! To charge an enemy one day for your sake!

Rudi seemed to have scribbled this last sentence very quickly at the end, as though some exaltation had taken hold of him. Elisabeth looked pensively at these few words, and then she returned to the passage about Arnim's sister Vera, whose acquaintance he wanted her to make. When she looked up again she experienced a curious sensation. Rudi had always appeared to her as the elder, whose will and authority she blindly accepted. Now, all of a sudden, it was as though she had grown the older of the two. Was it a change in her? Or in him? When he went to the cadet school the first time he was already a man in her eyes. Now she could only see him as a big boy and her feelings towards him acquired something maternal and protective.

Her relationship with her father had also grown different of late. The notion that Papa might have moments of weakness and of depression used never to enter her head. But as she grew up she began to

sense something of the great loneliness that surrounded him. He stepped down from the granite pedestal on which she had placed him and became a human being. The discovery amazed her, but once it was made she began to see everything much more clearly. She noticed how Mama intentionally kept him at a distance, though in an unobvious way, and how he bravely swallowed his disappointment. She noticed that in obedience to some categoric imperative of his own he held Mama very high before them, almost made her into an idol, an idol which he also still seemed to worship, unceasingly. And yet it was all in vain.

Why did Mama treat him like this? She was undoubtedly fond of him. But why did they not find the way to one another? Why did they preserve this obstinate silence when they were in the room together? If Elisabeth happened to come in she found Papa hiding behind a newspaper and Mama doing some embroidery. They never conversed. Had it always been like his? Sometimes there rose in her a sombre suspicion. She wondered whether at one time in the past something had occurred that separated them for ever from one another, and left between them an unbridgeable chasm. Did Mama bear a grudge because of something Papa had done to her long ago? Elisabeth could not imagine what it might have been, but even if he were guilty of something, how could Mama be so hard that she would not deliver him from his burden after all these years?

Elisabeth longed for an opportunity to reveal very discreetly to her father that she knew something about his hidden sorrows. He did not make it easy for her. Sometimes he was abrupt, as though to exclude the chance of any intimacy between them. One day she felt so rebuffed that she had to bite her lips in order not to burst out sobbing. He noticed it, and merely told her to go to Mama where she would be at liberty to cry. But he forgot that she was his daughter and had his tenacity. She kept close to him whether he wanted it or not, and gradually she began to gain ground. Sometimes he spoke to her a few words such as formerly he could only have said to Rudi. He said: "Mama doesn't feel well this afternoon. I've told Aunt Frieda, but you might go and have a look as well." She was glad to go and do as he told her. This time he had not meant it as a humiliation. It was a service she was rendering him, and he knew it was a service. Maria wondered at the splendid balance and the will-power of Elisabeth. Was she her daughter? Compared to her she felt weak, and she almost gave way to an urgent need to tell the girl everything. She would have spoken, had there not been on Elisabeth's lips a faint smile, as though of triumph, which made her wonder.

In the autumn Georg fell ill. He had not stayed in bed for thirty years and he failed to understand how all of a sudden he could not keep on his legs. He had fought this weakness for weeks. He felt

unusually tired when he came back from the morning ride with his children. The desire to see his eldest son who had not been home last summer became so pressing that it hurt him. He told Elisabeth on no account to mention a word of his illness to Rudi. Rudi also kept it to himself when he was ill, and Georg was not going to be weaker than his son. There was no need for Rudi to worry about him and it would merely have interfered with his studies.

Georg would not allow Dr. Prisswitz to be sent for. He was sure to get better without a doctor, and if he had not the strength to recover, medicines would not do it for him. But for the first time in her life Elisabeth disobeyed her father. She was amazed at her own daring. She wrote a confidential note to Dr. Prisswitz, who arrived one day on the pretence of paying a friendly call (though this time he did not come in his car, which was once more in the hands of the repairers.) He noticed that Georg's blood pressure was too high, that he suffered from nervousness, and was generally run down. He advised rest, and was surprised to see how meekly Georg agreed. He easily reconciled himself to the idea of staying in bed for some time, and declared that he had plenty to think of.—“As it happens, I'd so much like you to do hardly anything at all,” said Dr. Prisswitz.—“Easy to say,” said Georg with a laugh.

Maria felt a vague remorse and tried to look after her husband. But she was not a born nurse like Aunt Frieda, who entered and left a room as though she were the embodiment of service. Maria crept anxiously to the bed in order to see whether Georg was sleeping at last. As though even in his sleep he was aware of her restlessness, he opened his eyes and was at once wide awake. She sat down by the bedside, but did not know what to talk about. Best of all she would have liked to hide her face on his shoulder and to have a good cry. But he was ill, and she ought to try and be bright. As though she could have been bright! She did not understand that her tears would have been the best cure for him. She rose with trembling mouth. His eyes sadly followed her figure that spoke so clearly of her sense of guilt.

Now and then Elisabeth came to see him. He was touched by her solicitude. Angélique did not turn up at all, and little Stephan appeared only in the evening with his mother in order to say good-night as he was told. Georg looked pensively at his daughter and noticed how she quietly put a few things in order, or brought him a glass of water for which he had asked. This year she had become a young woman and he might perhaps feel proud of her. Was she a little fond of him, or was she only brought here by a sense of duty? It was said that girls usually become more attached to their father and boys to their mother. He himself had always wanted to have his boy for himself. His boy, who was now far away. At night he sometimes brooded over

dark thoughts. He wondered whether he would ever see Rudi again. In the daytime, of course, he realized how foolish such fears were. He did not belong to those who die easily. His body was made of iron. It was only inside his heart that death dwelled.

Sometimes he felt distrustful towards Elisabeth. Was she by any chance out to prove that he was luckier with his daughter than with his wife? Did she condemn Maria? Would she dare do such a thing? A dark resentment took hold of him and grew into anger. But when later he saw in Elisabeth's clear eyes how mistaken he was, he felt remorse. And yet the recurrence of these suspicions made him ill at ease when he was alone with her. His pride frequently rebelled against the fact that he needed assistance. He imagined then that the girl secretly enjoyed to see him so dependent. Who knows after all what strange desire of power is hidden in a woman? In the long run, however, all these ridiculous suspicions had to give way. Every afternoon he began to look forward more impatiently to the time when Herr von Brandt ended his lessons. His face turned towards the door, he listened for footsteps in the passage.

Once he had reached this stage he was unable to keep himself in hand. For the first time father and daughter held a conversation which they had to interrupt when someone else came in. Once he tried to find out what Elisabeth thought of Stephan. Did Mama still stick to her plan of making him a priest? Elisabeth of course had heard these things mentioned, but had never thought them worth much thought. It was only one of those notions of Mama's! She was astonished that Papa should enquire so earnestly about it. Didn't he think it as ridiculous as she did? She was afraid that he might read this surprise in her eyes and therefore she turned her face away and merely said that she had looked upon it all as a wish of Mama's but not as a settled plan. Georg looked at her sideways—he understood her. As the room grew darker he began to talk about the past. He talked about the dead Stephan who had something of a little priest about him, at any rate, so he always appeared to Mama. And then there had been the accident . . . Elisabeth listened. It was like a vision revealing to her what there was between her parents. It was the first Stephan and she had always suspected it. Tears ran down from her eyes, not because she felt sorry for Mama but only she was so profoundly grateful and happy that her father had at last taken her into his confidence.

"But Mama would never dream of forcing this thing against Stephan's wishes!" Georg took her hand. He knew now that his eldest daughter was his ally. At last he was getting something of the rest which Dr. Prisswitz had prescribed. If one day he was no longer there, Elisabeth would remain. He could even entrust her with the care of Maria. Of this he was now firmly convinced. She appeared so

beautifully balanced and she would be a beacon in the storm for all his family. She was the strongest one here, stronger perhaps than himself. Life had gradually softened him, as his collapse so painfully proved. But his strength had passed to his elder daughter, and he thanked God quietly for having granted at least this much to his doubting and lonely old age.

As Christmas drew near Georg did all he could to be better in time. He was successful and gave Dr. Prisswitz the honest assurance that he was sleeping once more. If only he could have communicated something of this treasure to Maria! But she also continued her lonely struggle. For her there was no great joy in sight, such as the arrival of his son was for him. She looked blindly into a future which she could not shape as she had hoped, and into a past that was beyond recall.

The day before Rudi's return the Major was up. He was pale and thinner, and his hair had turned much greyer. But he seemed able once more to walk straight, although his attitude had lost something of its proud aloofness, while in his eyes and on his features there was a greater gentleness. Of course, as the train rolled in, he was on the platform. Rudi noticed at once that something had happened to Papa, and he listened with surprise to the different tone of his conversation with Elisabeth.

As soon as they were home he said to his sister: "I say, I believe that I'm only number two with Papa now!"

She smiled. "Don't be afraid. You'll always remain number one. But you only come home during the vacations, and not even every time. Meanwhile Papa must have somebody with whom he can talk about his son. You see, I'll just do for that."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

DANCING LESSONS

RUDI had ample opportunity now to keep his promise and to tell Elisabeth everything about his holiday in Vienna. But she soon noticed that when he spoke of Vienna he thought only of Arnim's sister Vera. He shyly confessed that at Easter he would like to go again. Did she think Papa would agree? She gave him a glance and promised to support his request. He sighed with gratitude and said that she too ought to see Vienna. It was easily said! Besides, even if Papa had not needed her, she would not have felt the slightest inclination to go away.

Herr von Brandt paid another visit to Italy during the summer, and this time he visited the old cities of Tuscany and Umbria. She followed his journey on a map. In a description of Italy which she found in her father's library she read about the lovely churches and the monuments he was seeing. Now he was back once more studying till the small hours in his room, and he looked pale and tired. Elisabeth found it difficult not to mention the fact to him. Once she asked her father whether he could not convince the young man that he would ruin his health. Georg agreed at once that he was doing this, but added: "He must know himself. He won't listen to me." The unwillingness of the young teacher still irritated him when he thought of it.

She applied for support to her brother, who was able to do what no one else had achieved. He persuaded the fanatical student to take part in some of their collective recreations. The lake was frozen and it was discovered that von Brandt was very fond of skating. Several pairs of skates that were kept greased in the attic were fetched down. Ignaz was made to harness the sleigh and Mama made no difficulties because Stephan had caught the measles and could therefore not accompany them. While they drove in the sleigh Herr von Brandt talked about his Italian journey: he said that he had walked for miles on end carrying his rucksack, spending the nights in small inns where he sometimes had amusing experiences. This was the way to learn how kind-hearted other nations were. He thought it would be a good thing if diplomats were to go for long walking tours through neighbouring countries. Then they would never think of war again.

Rudi ventured a weak attempt to defend the tragic inevitability of war, but Herr von Brandt laughed and patted him on the shoulder. "Of course, that's what they teach you at school!" he said with a

laugh. "And as long as you people believe it we shall no doubt have more wars. You'd better go on a walking tour yourself!"

"I'd love to if you came too."

Ignaz was left to wait for them at the inn in Seekirchen. They tied on their skates and Herr von Brandt asked Elisabeth whether she would like to skate with him. Rudi followed with Angélique. Elisabeth's cheeks were aglow with the sunny winter air and with the joy of her success. She had at last dragged him away from his study. And now he was merry and unconcerned, just as she had pictured him when he was on holiday. "Where are you going next summer?" she asked, while they glided over the ice with long even strides.

"Farther away even than Italy! I'm sure you'll be jealous when you hear where I'm going."

"To Greece?"

He nodded with boyish pleasure. "This time I want to see the Parthenon, right on top of the Acropolis, with my own eyes!"

A picture rose before her mind. She must have seen a photograph of the Acropolis. Or were his words so vivid that they shaped an image in her mind? She thought it exquisite that something so beautiful was in store for him. How could he imagine that she would be jealous? At the same time she thought: then he'll be away once more for a month and a half. But she compelled herself not to think of this aspect of the future. She took advantage of his communicativeness: "And are you nearing the end of your studies?"

He laughed. "No, that doesn't go as quickly as you imagine! If I could go to lectures regularly I might be ready in two years' time. As it is, I have to plough through too much by myself."

He had no inkling of the happiness those few words gave her. Now that he had broken through his reserve, he told her more. His younger sister was now doing what he would so much have liked as a boy. She attended a school of art, and had married a landscape painter for whom a great future was predicted. At his last exhibition the Gallery of Modern Art of Munich bought one of his works.

Elisabeth felt that he was very fond of this sister and this brother-in-law although he did not say so. She wished she could make their acquaintance. "Would not your brother-in-law think this a very good country for painting?" she asked. She looked round and it was as though she discovered for the first time the crystal-like beauty of this winter landscape: the glittering congealed lake in the midst of the woods covered with white, and far in the distance the mountains with their limpid grandeur.

Von Brandt looked around. "We've gone a little too fast," he said, unexpectedly turning the conversation. "Angélique can't follow, we'd better go back. Dusk will come in a moment."

On the way back they did not exchange a word. Elisabeth had enough matter for thought. He set the pace with great vigour, and in the silence of the wide icy expanse the irons of their skates sang in rhythmic unison.

In September, on his return from his Greek journey, von Brandt once more displayed the annual miracle wrought by his summer holiday. At table he talked about beautiful Corfu, and described excursions to Corinth, Delphi, Sparta, and the Olympus. There were exhausting marches along dreadful paths winding their way across a rocky landscape that suffered from perpetual drought, but an unexpected drink made one forget all one's fatigue, and always there was the surprise of those ancient ruins! Von Brandt had no intention of talking otherwise than easily and humorously about his experiences, but he found it impossible to leave out of his descriptions the unforgettable impression of those temples, the warm golden glow of sun-bathed columns against the deep blue of the sky, the exquisite purity of the Ionic capital, the dramatic contrast of green, almost black, cypress trees and of white marble ruins. The ancient monuments of Rome were, he said, the expression of worldly power and grandeur; but Greece had known a period when beauty reigned, and nothing else.

Elisabeth saw Herr von Brandt navigating the blue waters of Greece, that beat and foamed against the gnarled rocks of ancient Hellas. She wondered how, after these experiences of his, she could still have the privilege of being taught by him. He could have filled with enthusiasm a large audience of students, yet here he was, back at Maria-Licht, to teach Stephan, Angélique and herself!

For the sake of such a master it would be worth while taking up her study with renewed zeal. By now she was able to read the more popular Latin classics with ease, and in spring she was almost as advanced with her Greek. She longed to know all the authors he had mentioned to her and she felt offended because there were some he did not want to place in her hands. She would be eighteen very soon and he would not find it possible to enforce his prohibition much longer. It seemed to Elisabeth that this childish restriction merely underlined in a painful way things which she would otherwise have passed over. She did not realize, of course, what licence these dignified ancients allowed themselves.

Angélique took a wicked pleasure in observing this struggle between Elisabeth and Herr von Brandt. "I'd never have thought you were so inquisitive," she said. It was a point on which conversation with her younger sister was painful. When they went to bed, and were alone in their room, Angélique often would tell stories she had picked up from the maids on the farm, and this brought from Elisabeth the most vehement expressions of repulsion and annoyance. This evening

she came again with questions that were far from being as guileless as the tone in which they were spoken. Elisabeth replied as calmly as she could, trying to subdue her irritation. All at once Angélique began to laugh very quietly in her bed.

"What are you laughing about?"

"Because you believe that you still must tell me fairy tales."

Elisabeth drew herself up and asked in a trembling voice: "If you know it all yourself why do you ask me then?"

"I wanted only to know how long you were still going to treat me as a child."

"You put childish questions!"

"Do I? Well, I won't any more. It isn't necessary, either, I know as much as you."

"What, everything!"

"Yes, everything. *Mariedl* has told me!"

Elisabeth sank down on her pillow, and as she looked at the vague light on the ceiling she felt something like pain. Then she collected such self-possession as was still in her: "*Mariedl* will leave—I'll talk about it to Papa."

"It's Ignaz who'll be sorry," said Angélique indifferently.

Elisabeth did not fall asleep easily that night. She noticed that Angélique also was restless and awake. But she did not resume the conversation. After much debating she decided not to tell her father after all. Perhaps this discretion would make Angélique feel grateful.

Oh, why did Angélique do this to her? Why did she sully herself? She felt sorry and vaguely afraid for her younger sister and again thoughts of reproach arose in her towards Mama, who saw only Stephan, and not even the living Stephan, but only the dead one.

The summer would bring Rudi's final examination at the cadet school, and if he were successful he would enter the army as a cornet. Nobody doubted that he would be successful, and Georg considered that the event ought to be celebrated, all the more as Elisabeth's eighteenth birthday should not pass entirely unnoticed. Otto wrote that he would like to come from Graz and that his wife, who had not yet seen Maria-Licht, might like to come also. Georg rejoiced at the prospect of seeing his old friend and sent invitations to Father Aigner and to Dr. Prisswitz. Arnim was to come with Rudi, but would go home immediately after the family celebration. Of course, Arnim wrote, this was if he conquered his golden tassel. If not, there was not the slightest hurry about his going home.

The two newly appointed subalterns arrived at Seekirchen at the beginning of July. At Graz they were joined by Uncle Otto and Aunt Julia. On the small platform Rudi found not only his family but all the guests. And Father Aigner had arranged for the Saint

Cecilia band to welcome his young friend. Rudi was just going to wave his cap, but Arnim warned him in time with a secret punch in the back that he had to stand to attention. The band had just begun the National Anthem. The Major took off his hat very slowly; it was probably due to his sixty-nine years that tears welled up in his eyes. He would have liked to control himself. But to see his own boy there, an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, with the Imperial Anthem played in his honour! How could he have borne it?

Elisabeth's birthday, which had taken place a week before, was celebrated on this day. After Father Aigner had spoken a few words at the table, Dr. Prisswitz rose. He never carried his wine as well as the others and usually after his first or his second glass he was seized with an irresistible desire to deliver a toast. In his well-meaning address he touched upon things that might better have remained unsaid, he spoke of wounds inflicted by life, but that were wonderfully healed by the action of time. He declared that he had had the privilege of observing the rebuilding of this happy family from close by, and that it found its crowning in this double celebration. But suddenly he met the horrified eyes of Maria and wondered whether the wounds inflicted by time had really all been cured.

In his speech Georg greeted all his guests and thanked them for their presence. Then he turned to Rudi and Arnim and gave expression to words about the Emperor and the Fatherland which his old officer's heart dictated. He sent Stephan to fetch the cavalry sabre with which on the 24th of June, 1866, he had taken part in the charge at Custozza. He made a step towards his son and handed the sword to him and kissed him on the forehead. Rudi was unable to reply, tears streamed down his cheeks. Georg had the greatest difficulty in mastering his own emotion as he returned to his seat.

All the guests had been impressed by the pathetic gesture of the Major. But Maria looked strangely absent, just as she did during the speech of Dr. Prisswitz. Father Aigner and Paul von Brandt looked involuntarily at one another and knew at once that they agreed in their opinion of this naïve and romantic gesture. The Major still lived in the period of cavalry charges and trumpet calls.

When no one gave any more toasts, Arnim rose to express his thanks for the hospitable reception that made him feel as though he were a member of the family. He spoke with remarkable ease. When a sentence threatened to become too solemn, he gave it a light-hearted turn at the last moment. They were all glad that he made them laugh and Maria looked round failing to understand how the atmosphere had suddenly changed so completely.

Julia nodded at her like one mother to another. Rudi's young Viennese friend had taken her by storm. She pictured already the closest family connection between him and the Weygands. Perhaps,

maybe, he was a little too frivolous for Elisabeth. Did her preference by any chance go to von Brandt? Julia differed from her husband in her judgment of the solemn cousin from Vienna. She was glad that he would leave the following day for Pompeii or some such place. It was really because of his somewhat uncertain position in this house that she had hesitated so long before coming. She could not understand why this boy had disgraced his family in such a manner. It almost amounted to desertion. Fancy giving up an honourable officer's career, and for what! What did he want to be? A historian of art? How could one live by this profession? She hoped for the sake of Elisabeth that she would not lose her heart to such a man.

The following day she asked Georg to go for a walk with her. No need for him to be afraid, she added with a wink, Otto was gradually beginning to trust her. As soon as they were outside the castle she began her sermon. Surely, she said, he was no longer hoping that Maria would one day resume her place as the lady of the castle? Life had broken her. If she neglected her duties, it was not her fault and one should be sorry for her. But since this was the situation, it was his duty to be not only a father but also something of a mother to his children. She was thinking in particular, she said, of his two daughters. Elisabeth was eighteen, and in Vienna she would count as a beauty. Here there was no one to notice and to appreciate her true value. Here in Carinthia she would lose her bloom before she could enjoy it. As soon as Angélique also was eighteen, he must take his daughters to Vienna and present them at Court. The spring races were the time: all Vienna would be there. Arnim and Rudi could get leave at the same time and serve as cavaliers for the girls. Of course he would have to go too, and surely it was a privilege to go as the father of two such daughters. Nor should Maria stay behind. People would only talk. Perhaps it would do her good to be torn away from her painful and aimless meditations. The journey would give her plenty to think about! To begin with the girls would have to take dancing lessons. Frocks would be ordered from Vienna, for to wear anything made at Klagenfurt would stamp them as provincials. There was time enough for the frocks, but the dancing lessons ought to begin at once. And this, she said, was what she had to tell him, although he need not listen to her. But he would have to admit one thing: if he kept his daughters imprisoned here, their choice would be limited to von Brandt and the Doctor when the time came for them to marry.

Georg looked at her with irritation. He did not appreciate jokes on this subject and she could at least have left Dr. Prisswitz out of it. Anyhow, and even without this last argument, he had been persuaded, and he wondered how he had failed to realize the danger

long ago. Angélique didn't matter yet, but Elisabeth was eighteen, the age of his first wife. Elisabeth ought to meet other men apart from von Brandt. He did not think for a moment that she saw in him anything except a teacher. Nevertheless, Julia was right.

Only, he did not like to concede to Julia the honour of having opened his eyes. He nodded slowly and said that he had already played once or twice with the idea of giving Elisabeth and Angélique a trip to Vienna, say in a year or so. As a matter of fact he did not at all like the thought that in such a short time his daughter Elisabeth would be ripe for marriage.

"We'll look in the local paper. I'm sure it will have advertisements from dancing masters," said Julia with her usual enterprise.

At night she discussed the dancing lessons at the full table. Arnim suggested that they had better begin at once. He undertook the task of initiating the two girls into the first mysteries of the art. The only difficulty was that he did not very well see how he could dance and play the piano at the same time. But Aunt Julia was ready to do her share; she sat down at the piano and surprised them all, apart of course from her husband, by playing the polkas, the waltzes, and other dances of her younger years. Some of her notes may have met with an accident on the way, but this hardly mattered. Her sense of rhythm and her old facility were still there. She played with such enthusiasm that Otto looked proudly round the room.

With the seriousness of a professional dancing master Arnim showed the first steps to the laughing girls. He first took Elisabeth, and then Angélique, in his arms and counted: "One—two—three, one—two—three, first the left, then the right." He invited Aunt Frieda to dance a polka with him. She resisted desperately but of course she had to give way. Julia was no longer able to keep at the piano. She called to Otto that she wanted him to dance with her. Arnim quickly took her place and, to everybody's surprise, began to play dance-tunes that had been the rage thirty years ago. Aunt Julia dragged her sighing Otto from his easy chair. While they danced, Otto stiff and dignified, and Julia red in the face with pleasure, Georg rose very slowly and went to make his bow before Maria. She looked at him amazed, hesitating, not quite knowing what she was to do. At last she rose from her chair and placed her hand on her husband's arm. He guided her round very cautiously; she stared over his shoulder with a dreamy expression in her eyes, and gradually something almost like a smile appeared on her lips. The children looked on fascinated, pale with emotion. Arnim, who was playing with his back to the room, noticed nothing and broke off in the middle of a waltz when he heard Aunt Julia falling in a chair laughing and out of breath. Georg escorted Maria to her place, and there was a proud glint in his eyes.

Later in the evening they took wine, and Maria stayed with them

and joined in the conversation with a vivacity that no one remembered. Had something awakened in her? Georg tried to make himself believe it just for that one evening. He knew that he would be unable to sleep that night, and that to-morrow the transient spark would once more be extinguished. Anyhow, he had recalled once again the things that used to be between them. To-morrow it would be a new memory to cherish. It seemed to him that he had now reached the age of memories. He filled Otto's glass, lifted his own and touched that of his friend with a hearty laugh.

Julia was still rather excited. Without being asked, she held out her glass to clink with theirs. Then her look went to Arnim who was in deep conversation with the two girls. His youthful uniformed figure stood out in sharp silhouette against the dark blue of the summer's night. Oh, if she had met this man when she was a girl, would she have ever given way to Otto's obstinate and awkward courtship? It was a good thing that fate had not tempted her in such a way.

It was as Georg had expected. Maria was wakeful during the night, and once or twice he heard her utter a dejected sigh. He gently took her hand and kept it in his. She cried, but did not speak a word. He did not expect words from her and did not even wish for them. Were words still needed between them?

Angélique could not fall asleep either. All her old feelings for Arnim had flared up. Thinking that she had become completely indifferent to him, she had tried to make it clear how pleased she would be to see him depart for Vienna the next morning. But while dancing with him she became conscious once more of her weakness. She was unable to resist him. It was an excellent thing that he slept with Rudi to-night: otherwise she might have committed a folly. Happily the following morning she was in complete control of herself and able to look at him with her mocking and indifferent smile. Only she felt in a very bad temper.

Uncle Otto and Aunt Julia left with the same train. Aunt Julia held a large bouquet of flowers tightly clasped against her bosom, and waved agitatedly with her handkerchief. Her cheeks were glowing. Uncle Otto looked a little pale and yawned behind his hand.

Rudi and Arnim sent in an application to be allowed to serve in the same regiment of Uhlans. They were granted the favour and in the autumn they left together for their first garrison, a small town in the Bukovina. Maria-Licht had become very quiet once more. Georg kept up a correspondence with Otto about the Agadir question and about the Italo-Turkish war. Otto predicted that the Italians would capture Tripoli without even fighting a battle, owing to the desperately antiquated condition of the Turkish forts on the coast,

and to the deplorable condition of the fleet of the Crescent. The real battle, he said, would only begin when the Italians ventured inland where the fanatical hatred of the warlike Arabs awaited them. Julia added a postscript to his letter, insisting that the dancing lessons should begin at once.

It was due to her representations that the lessons materialized in the end. Once a week an Italian dancing master, Maestro Fantini, who lived at Klagenfurt, appeared at the castle. He brought with him a large, old-fashioned gramophone which he handled with the greatest care. He carried it down himself after the lesson to the seat of the cab that was waiting for him. He was thin and livid, fantastically dressed, and so ugly that the maids on the farm teased one another about him. But his sense of dignity was so immense that wherever he appeared the smile died from every face. When he danced with Elisabeth to the raucous music of worn-out records he looked up to the ceiling with an air of such infinite ecstasy that Angélique was struck dumb and entirely forgot to follow his steps with her eyes. One day Maestro Fantini exclaimed in a cutting tone: "If you don't pay any attention whatever, you will never learn anything, Signorina! You're just standing there! Once more now: left foot in front, draw up the right. . . ." As he made this remark in his bad German, half-speaking and half-singing, his mouth creased once more in the same set smile, while his eyes grew narrow and dreamy. But the girls had learnt that the smile was only a deceptive mask.

They had imagined at first that the dancing lessons would be an amusement and a distraction, and that they would have much fun during them. But this illusion did not last long. Stephan, who had begged to be allowed to join the classes, now was trying to be let off. He pleaded in vain that he had no partner of his own size. Angélique was ambitious from the beginning, and was the first to make the Maestro more or less satisfied with her performance. Elisabeth was genuinely delighted to find something in her sister that could be admired. "You're sure to win prizes one of these days!" she said.

When Herr von Brandt noticed how amazingly earnestly these lessons were taken he teased the girls once or twice. Elisabeth tried to explain herself in an apologetic manner. It was Maestro Fantini, or Paganini, as von Brandt called him, who made the whole thing so solemn, said Elisabeth. She did not want to take it so seriously. Angélique listened to her without concealing her sarcastic expression. Was it Herr von Brandt's concern whether these dancing lessons were taken solemnly or not? After all, what mattered more for a girl: a knowledge of dancing or a knowledge of the Iliad? But she realized very well what was behind it all. Herr von Brandt felt a little jealous of the young men with whom Elisabeth would dance. Happily he had no notion that at present he was the only young man for Elisabeth.

Elisabeth did not know it herself. She still imagined that she was so good at his own favourite subjects, Greek and Latin, because she happened to be keen on them.

As for Angélique she was not so constant in her affections as her older sister. Obstinacy of this nature was only a source of bother. She could not understand how she could have lost her head at one time for the sake of this schoolmaster who lived exclusively for his books. Her infatuation for Arnim was also passing, thank goodness. Let Arnim turn another girl's head somewhere else; she was through with him. At present she had an entirely different preoccupation. It was something new and strange; no one in the world was to know about it, not even the one who was most closely concerned, Maestro Fantini.

One could not have called it exactly "being in love." At night Angélique often dreamt that she floated through the room in his arms. Though the music came from his old gramophone, none could have been rarer and more exquisite. And even in her dreams she knew as well as when she was awake that he was ugly, that his nose was impossibly large and pointed, and that it stood beneath a pair of hard, dark eyes, and a narrow forehead. But what did it matter? It all was part of him. He did not mind being ugly, and the knowledge did not take away any of his self-confidence. So surely it did not matter! No girl could help looking at his face with its expression of passionate grief and enthusiasm. It was as fascinating as his cool bird-like pride. Once she even felt that it was rather pleasant to be so conscious of his ugliness, so conscious that she could laugh about it with other people. If he ever ventured to kiss her she would probably run away with a shriek as though he were a big ape. All she wanted was to be held in his arms while there was on his lips that smile of delight, so profoundly respectful even while it crushed her independence. No, he was never, never to know how she could long for him during the night.

Angélique and Elisabeth were to go to the New Year's Eve Ball at Klagenfurt, where Maestro Fantini held the Annual Reunion of his pupils. They were to be accompanied by Papa, Mama and Aunt Frieda. Georg realized that he could not escape this duty. When he saw Elisabeth in her pink dancing frock, he felt rather less reluctant. As for Stephan, he might not have been over-keen on his dancing lessons but he was determined not to miss the ball. It brought him ample reward for his painful exertions. There was an entrancing ten-year-old blonde who consented to dance with him the whole evening. Elisabeth was one of the first to be asked for each dance. Soon she began to be amused at the keen competition on the part of the cavaliers, and she had to laugh when young men, who had been standing with apparent unconcern in the neighbourhood for a few

minutes, suddenly pounced on her from three or four places at once. Quite a number of them seemed to be afraid of Angélique's dark mocking eyes. But she did not mind being a wall-flower because it increased her chance of being asked by the Maestro himself. On one occasion, just as he moved towards her, a red-haired youth clumsily came up to her just in time. She was furious with him even before he had introduced himself, and yet, to her intense annoyance, he returned regularly to her for each dance. He was not frightened off by her offensive indifference and he ventured a compliment, almost stammering, about her dancing. As he spoke his face grew almost as red as his hair. He said that he knew very well who she was, and that he had often seen her. Thereupon she felt obliged to ask him to repeat his name. He was Ludwig Mayer, the son of the apothecary of Klagenfurt, known for his money and his miserliness.

At midnight prizes were distributed for the best couples. Angélique looked on without envy while the crowned couples gave a display of their art. She knew that she was not inferior to any of these girls but of course they had been able to select a better partner. She was a stranger here and all the others had arranged for suitable partners beforehand. It is true that Ludwig Mayer would have been only too glad to make such an arrangement with Angélique. He told her that he played the piano and asked whether she played no instrument. He said he was sure she was musical, because one could notice it while she danced. Angélique did not mention her violin, which had been neglected for some time in any case, and tried to put him off with a vague promise that did not engage her. But he noticed this and insisted. She became sharp and left him no hope whatever. When she went over the evening in her thoughts later on, she did not think so ill of the lovesick stammerer. She wondered whether he was going to dream of her the whole night and whether she might not pay him a surprise visit at Klagenfurt one day, even if it were only to make merry at his expense. The chemist's shop was a painful detail. But that evening he had certainly seen no one else but her, and that was a point in his favour. At the same time she experienced a sense of shame because, with her usual quick perception, she had noticed that nearly every girl in the ball-room had been waiting secretly for Maestro Fantini to ask her to dance.

The following morning Herr von Brandt enquired whether the girls had enjoyed themselves and whether they had found a sufficient number of partners. "I was a wall-flower most of the time," said Angélique, "but Elisabeth was not allowed to miss a single dance! Once there were seven of them asking her at the same time!" She exaggerated a little, because she wanted to make him jealous. But why take the trouble: she was certain that Elisabeth would at once say something to reassure him. And sure enough, her sister replied:

"They were all youngsters, and sometimes I felt almost ashamed to dance with them, because I felt so much older!" Elisabeth laughed, but it was as though Herr von Brandt noticed the mocking sparkle in Angélique's eyes. He put no further questions.

At Whitsun Ignaz and Mariedl were married. Every one was surprised that Mariedl had succeeded in dragging him to the altar. But then, she was going to have a baby! She took a risk that frightened all the other girls on the farm. Who would have imagined that Ignaz would ever take pity on the mother? Everybody had warned Mariedl, but she seemed not to mind in the slightest, and she ran into the danger with open eyes. And lo and behold, she was rewarded for her recklessness. Her wise advisers had a pitying smile. They said that Ignaz would soon put her through her paces!

Whatever the future might hold in store for Mariedl, the wedding was a grand occasion. The farmyard was festively adorned and there was no lack of guests. Ignaz seemed to know the whole village of Seekirchen, and they all did themselves proud with the Major's beer and his wine and with the wedding tart, the sausages and the pancakes to which Magdalena Eisengruber treated them. Brandl, the village fiddler, and Suffheini, who paid for his drinks in the inns by playing the accordion, provided the dance music. In the half-dark, when the Chinese lanterns were lit, the fun began in earnest. Mariedl, red with excitement, turned and swung with the best, but one could see that in her condition she found it rather fatiguing. All the girls naturally vied with one another for a dance with the bridegroom, but the bride kept a wary eye on him, and in order not to spoil her day Ignaz impartially divided his attentions among them all.

The inhabitants of the castle came to look at the open-air ball. Even Herr von Brandt was unable to resist the lure of the mild May evening that was so full of the scent of flowers. As they looked on, the girls felt that they would love to join the dance, but nobody dared ask them. Yes! There was Toni Eisengruber, back home after his long period of military service. Perhaps he read their secret wish in their eyes. He was brave enough to go and make his bow before Elisabeth, while the others laughed and applauded. Elisabeth accepted at once, whereupon Ignaz jumped up from behind his zither and ran towards Angélique. Suffheini started a polka and the couples twirled around. Elisabeth, seeking Herr von Brandt with her eyes, saw old Eisengruber and she could read the pride on his furrowed face. She gave a friendly nod as she passed the white-haired farmer, and his mouth unfolded into a shy smile. Perhaps it was owing to the old man that she felt she must say a few words to her partner: "How well you've learnt to dance, Toni!"—"I've been a soldier in town," he said with a laugh—"Wouldn't you have liked to stay there instead

of coming back to the countryside here?" He explained that a farmer had nothing to hope for in town and she was struck by the ease with which he conversed. His whole being expressed quiet and balance.

They had to walk a few steps together after the dance: he was taking her back to her place. She noticed that he thanked her for the dance in a very formal manner, with a voice that was somewhat distant. She did not dare ask why he no longer called her by her name as he used to do. She felt that Herr von Brandt's eyes were on her. Her teacher applauded her when she came near him, but she could not yet forgive him for having waited to invite her, and for having allowed another to do it. "You don't dance at all, of course?" she asked him challengingly.

"If I've ever been sorry I didn't, it's now," he said. It irritated her that his words tried to express good-humoured banter, as though he were thirty years older than she. It was a pity he did not dance, but a cheap compliment was no compensation. She preferred to make no comment and she took the arm of Franzl, the forester's son, who invited her. His younger brother carried off Angélique. This was a great moment for Brigitte, whose pride in her two gigantic sons was proverbial. After this the girls were not allowed to miss a single dance. Ignaz waltzed with Elisabeth, who found it difficult to follow his quick paces. Afterwards he asked Angélique, and he asked her once more after this. Then Mariedl quietly hooked her arm through his and did not let go of him for the rest of the evening.

Angélique was already in bed when the bridal pair was escorted home to the sound of music. As she listened, she remembered how, during the last dance, Ignaz had pressed her in his arms. What a lot of fun there was in life! She was only gradually discovering it.

Rudi was in garrison at Czernowitz close to the Russian and the Roumanian border. It was so far from home that he could not come back until he had a period of long leave. But his letters were more frequent than ever and he sent extensive reports, full of humorous detail, about the dull garrison life in this Hungarian province. The great events of the year were the reviews on the Emperor's birthday and on the birthday of the Colonel. The young ladies who appeared at the two regimental balls that were invariably connected with these events talked Russian and Roumanian, sometimes even a little Hungarian, but none of these languages was any use to Rudi. The daughter of his landlady, a clever young Jewess, who knew all these languages and also Galician German, assisted him in his linguistic education. In order to prove his progress, still a little doubtful, he included a Hungarian greeting for Mama in one of his letters.

At Easter he went to Budapest with Arnim. The journey was

long, but worth while, because Arnim's two sisters accompanied their parents to Budapest. At night they had supper on a terrace over the Danube, and to the accompaniment of gipsy music they looked at the grand view of the two river banks, with their rows of sparkling lights beneath the starry sky. In such an atmosphere, garrison life would be tolerable, but the return to Czernowitz had been rather depressing. The whole regiment was now hoping that it would be allowed to take part in the autumn manœuvres. Every one was profoundly bored and craving for excitement to such an extent that they would have been grateful if there had been a real enemy to march against. As she read this sentiment Elisabeth felt that Rudi himself would also have been grateful for such a sensation, although he tried to hide the fact by putting a row of exclamation marks after the sentence. If he had not felt it, he would not have mentioned it, because he was bound to know that it would frighten his sister. Was he beginning to feel the influence of his new environment? Or did he want to gather martial laurels for the sake of Arnim's elder sister? Who was the enemy of whom these young officers were thinking? The Russian and Roumanian garrisons in the neighbourhood were only mentioned when Rudi described the friendly cavalry competitions between his regiment and the colleagues across the frontiers.

In the summer Rudi was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant and he was able to spend his first period of leave at home. The Colonel had been generous because the regiment would be allowed to take part in the manœuvres, and what is more, it would have the honour of fighting on the side of the heir to the throne. Since last summer Rudi had grown more manly and sturdy. At the officers' club he had acquired the habit of reading the newspapers, and this gave him a new importance in the eyes of Elisabeth. The newspapers were full of news about an impending Balkan war. Servia, Bulgaria and Greece wanted to free themselves from the hated Turkish yoke, and felt encouraged by Italy's triumph over the Crescent. But, said Rudi, Turkey was much stronger in its home country than in the distant colonies for which it no longer cared. The three allied states would soon find this out. Servia could do with a sound trouncing. If Turkey put it in its place, the dual monarchy would not have to undertake the task a couple of years hence.

Rudi brought home a letter written by his Colonel to his father. The two used to know each other in years gone by, and in the familiar tone that was current in the Austrian Officers' Corps he wrote: "Haven't you got any more of the same brand for me?" Georg sat down to reply at once: "I have another son, but I don't know yet whether I'll make him an officer." He thought it wiser not to show the letter to Maria.

Rudi left for his first manœuvres full of great expectations. While in the Balkans bloody battles were fought, his regiment went to play at war in Galicia. "From the field," was marked on the few hasty scraps, sometimes scribbled on half a leaf from a pocket-book, and sometimes on fine ladies' writing paper, according to the place where Rudi was quartered. It was an exquisite October for Rudi and his comrades. They would spend one night in the hay of a barn, and the next in a castle. Polish landlords and their ladies fought for the honour of giving hospitality to a dozen cavalry officers. After an exhausting and exciting day the young conquerors were placed at a rich table loaded with the best wines, and after the meal, when they were so sleepy that they could hardly keep their eyes open, there was music and they had to show that they could dance. Then early next morning there were rides, wild fights in the half-dark woods, and always the chance of being congratulated by the heir to the throne, who followed operations very closely.

Then, suddenly, came an alarming item: a young officer of the other side, whom Arnim had taken prisoner, refused to hand over his sword and tried to escape. "You coward!" shouted Arnim as he rode away. It was a foolish word, which merely expressed Arnim's annoyance and disappointment because the other man was not playing the game. Like all his comrades, he was a little overwrought by all his emotions and by lack of sleep. Moreover, precisely at the end of the previous evening he had fallen in love. Anyhow the other man turned back and came slowly towards them: he saluted and mentioned his name; Count Schanzdorn. And thus the game looked like becoming serious after all. After the end of the manœuvres the two would meet at a place that was to be settled afterwards. Schanzdorn was garrisoned in Bohemia, and it would take each of them a day's journey to meet the other. Arnim, the offending party, had been compelled to leave the choice of weapons to his opponent, who had chosen pistols. This rather upset Arnim who, as Elisabeth no doubt knew, was an excellent fencer but a poor shot. Of course, he asked Rudi to be his second, and the other second was a young Viennese lieutenant, Poldi von Brauswetter. Rudi said that he wrote in strict confidence: he was sure she would realize why he had to ask this.

Elisabeth closed the letter with trembling fingers. She tried to think what she would have to invent when Papa asked her at table what Rudi had written. But her thoughts whirled and she could think of nothing. She wanted at once to write to Arnim's parents, to call in Papa's assistance, or perhaps that of Herr von Brandt. But she knew this was impossible. What was she to do? Somebody was coming, and she fled with the letter to her room. By the time she

went down for the meal she had decided what to say. The only thing she could not hide was her total lack of appetite.

Rudi's next letter showed clearly that he regretted his indiscreet communicativeness. He begged her once more not to mention it to anybody and not even to refer to it in her reply. She knew no doubt, he added, that duels were forbidden in the army, and Arnim would never forgive her if something were found out through Rudi's fault. It was only that the secret was so dreadful that he was unable to bear it by himself. He had to tell her, his great confidante, and now she was indeed helping him to bear his burden so much that she could not sleep at night.

Rudi's next letter hardly mentioned the manœuvres. The other affair was preoccupying all his thoughts. The 12th of November had been chosen as the date. No other date would have done, because the six young men concerned would not be able to get leave at the same time. There would be punishment in any case for the four seconds as well as for the two principals. Rudi was glad to be able to make this sacrifice for his friend. God grant that it was not the last friendly service he could render him. "To-morrow we are back at Czernowitz, and Arnim will practise every day with the pistol," he wrote. "We have two weeks left!"

"We." He looked upon his friend's misfortune as his own, and Elisabeth was terribly anxious lest, if Arnim were wounded or even worse, this might mean complications for her brother.

Until now the duel had been coloured with the heroic intoxication of the daily engagements that were part of the manœuvres. It was only when back in the everyday matter-of-factness of garrison life that Rudi began to feel oppressed by what was going to happen. He did not know what to write about, and yet he felt the need of keeping in touch with his sister. So he tried to reassure her, and himself, by sending figures to show Arnim's progress with the pistol. Naturally the figures meant very little to her except that there was a rather dreadful sound about communications like this: "Yesterday, three bulls' eyes in succession! To-day, even better results: in a series of twelve, four bulls' eyes, two nines, five eights!" He did not send any details about the duel, about the distance at which the opponents would have to stand, but this fact in itself frightened her. She could understand everything, because although she was not a man, she was the daughter and the sister of an officer. But Rudi's mysteriousness, which was merely due to the fact that she knew nothing about shooting, was a thing she failed to understand. Rudi was not making it easy for her to keep her secret. She was absent-minded and began to look unwell, and meanwhile the unusual stream of news from Czernowitz continued.

Once or twice Herr von Brandt gave a searching, almost worried

look at Elisabeth, when he noticed that she was absent-minded during his lessons, but he asked her no questions. One day her father suddenly came to her and asked: "What's the matter with Rudi?" She tried to evade the inquiry. "With Rudi?" Georg looked into her eyes. For the first time his preoccupation changed into fear. He seized her wrist: "Tell me what's the matter with him!"

"I'm not allowed to talk, Papa."

He had gone as pale as she. "Don't be mysterious! I want to know!"

"I'll tell you everything after Thursday, Papa."

"A duel?" he whispered hoarsely.

Hastily, glad to be able to liberate him from his worst fear, she brought out the words: "No, Papa! Not Rudi! A comrade. . . ."

Georg heaved a deep sigh. He did not want to remember having heard her last words. He turned away and left the room. Elisabeth knew that she could count on him. He would never give her away. But her confession brought no liberation. How could it have done? It was impossible to arrest the fatal march of events. Papa did not once return to the subject. She felt that his eyes rested on her more often than usual. He was more worried about her now than about Rudi's friend. It was obvious to him who was the person in question, and he felt as anxious as Elisabeth.

Luckily Maria was once more in one of her periods of total apathy. Angélique, burning with curiosity, looked everywhere to find Rudi's letters, but Elisabeth carefully kept them under lock and key. Angélique suspected a love intrigue: Elisabeth and Papa must be worried because Rudi had become involved in something of the kind during the manœuvres.

On the evening of 10th of November Rudi wrote a final letter:

"This affair has given me enough of duelling for the rest of my life. I used to see something romantic and heroic in it, but now it just fills me with loathing. No one with an atom of decency could quietly wait for weeks while a duel is drawing near. To wait for the day when one may get killed, or when one will kill someone against whom one has not the slightest resentment! I think there is something disgusting in a code of honour that forbids Arnim from going to Schanzdorn and telling him: 'I'm sorry; next time, I'll mind my words a little better.' To fight when you're angry is one thing; but this cold-blooded arrangement is nerve-racking. Arnim is no coward, but I can see that he has to struggle against his anxiety and that he suffers because he considers it cowardly. Yesterday evening he said to me: 'I've got so far now that I'd rather be shot down by him than that I should have to feel remorse throughout my life for killing him.' To-morrow morning we are off very early. If Arnim

were to fall, I don't think that I should feel much inclination to remain an officer. But in that case I'll see to it that Count Schanzdorn knows whom he shot down."

In this little sentence lay the threat Elisabeth had felt hanging over her all the time. It drove her mad with fear. Two days passed without news. Then Georg, feverishly scanning the newspaper, read that in the little wood near Budapest which had become notorious as a duelling-ground, two young lieutenants, Count S. and A. v. S., had met with pistols, with the result that the latter was wounded in the shoulder. Georg went to Elisabeth and kissed her. She was too nervous to catch the meaning of the words he showed her. "It has ended all right," he said. She sobbed with pent-up emotion. How she longed for news from Rudi! It came by post two days later. Naturally Rudi had been given his deserved punishment, he was confined to his room and lost his spring leave; but it might have been worse, and the Colonel was obviously kindly disposed towards him. Arnim would have to spend a week in hospital and then he would get some punishment too. Rudi, who felt inclined now to look upon the whole affair from its pleasantest side, gave an extensive and spirited report of the duel: "It had been agreed that we should meet at six in the morning. At five we stepped out and the cabby who had been ordered the night before refused to take us at first when we told him where we were going. He gave way at last, but probably more owing to our persuasive crowns than owing to our reassuring statements in Hungarian. It grew lighter when we reached the agreed spot. The two doctors were already waiting and a moment later Schanzdorn arrived with his two seconds. We had to measure the distance: thirty paces. I shall never again be able to hear the figure thirty without getting a cold shiver down my back. I knew that Arnim could hit easily if his hand remained steady. And as the other chap had chosen the revolver, there was no doubt about him either. Schanzdorn was entitled to shoot first. I could only look at him, because I found it impossible to look at Arnim, and I saw that he found it very difficult to take aim. After what seemed an eternity the shot went off. Arnim remained standing, very pale, but he smiled, and it was only from the movement of his left shoulder-strap that one could see he was wounded. His uniform coat began to colour red near the shoulder. The doctors asked whether he wanted assistance, but he declined. It was his turn; he pointed his pistol upward and fired in the air. We thought Schanzdorn would do the same, but he aimed once more; only his hand trembled so much that there was more chance of his hitting us than his opponent. We waited for the shot with an air of angry mockery. Somewhere a twig dropped off a tree, and that was all. Arnim behaved splendidly. The

smile did not leave his face. Now that it was his turn once more he slowly moved his arm upward. For a moment we all thought that he was going to aim at Schanzdorn and touch him, but he fired once more in the air. Von Brauswetter and I looked at each other: we were so incredibly proud of our friend. At last Schanzdorn came to his senses. After the two last shots had been sent into the top of the trees, Arnim allowed himself to be helped out of his coat. Schanzdorn came towards us to shake hands; he looked rather sheepish. Then he drove away in his carriage with his seconds who did not altogether know whether the duel had been particularly honourable for them. I used to know one of them at the cadet school, he was a charming boy. We stayed behind waiting for Arnim. It was so peaceful after all the shooting that everything seemed strange and incredible. The meadow was so quiet under a slight mist beneath the tall autumnal trees. The two doctors could not agree about the kind of bandage that was needed. 'Why don't you put one each, gentlemen?' said Arnim. I had to laugh, and we all felt better. Then we drove back to Budapest, Arnim with his arm in a sling covered by his mantle so that no one should notice. We had breakfast on that terrace overlooking the Danube which I once described to you. Arnim wanted to treat us to champagne, but we felt much more like having a cup of black coffee. He said he had enjoyed himself so much that he intended to become a professional duellist. What is funny is that I could so thoroughly feel what he meant. Never has the world seemed so beautiful to me as it did yesterday morning, when, instead of having to go to Vienna in order to inform Arnim's parents. . . . But I need not say any more. When we wanted to step into the train for Czernowitz, we were arrested. Our good cabby had been and told the police. We were ordered forthwith to rejoin our regiment, which was just what we were trying to do. You know the rest. The worst is that we shan't get leave next spring. What about the expedition to Vienna? I'm very sorry about it, little sister."

There was a postscript under the letter: "What does Papa say about the defeat of the Turks?" Rudi had suddenly recovered his interest in world affairs.

The Major was very sorry that the Servians who were always behaving so inimically to the monarchy now looked like winning the war, which upset him more than the hitch about the Vienna expedition. He did not seem to mind in the least that this would have to be postponed by a year. Aunt Frieda cried when Elisabeth read aloud Rudi's story of the duel. Stephan was very pale and so excited that he could not eat. Angélique forgot the humiliations Arnim had inflicted upon her, and in the evening she wrote him a madly passionate letter in which she gave herself away completely. The others wrote a collective letter. Georg sat down for a separate brief word

to his son. "I am not going to preach, because I am confident that this ridiculous story will have taught you a lesson. Most duellists are just young fools. It is obvious that one should not tolerate an offence against one's honour. But it is equally obvious that one should make certain that there has been an offence. Please never fail to remember that you still have a mother." He did not say a word about himself.

Angélique waited with an anxious heart for Arnim's reply. At first she found a number of reasons for its delay. Perhaps he was not allowed to write in hospital. But one day a letter arrived, addressed to the whole family, in which Arnim thanked them all for their interest and added a special greeting for Angélique at the end of the letter. She felt like a beggar who is given alms shamefacedly and out of pity. Once more he rejected her, but he had never done it so clearly as this time. It made her lose all her self-confidence. Slowly her bitter disappointment turned into cynicism and self-mockery, until she hated and despised every man. Did men deserve that one should worry and torture oneself for their sake? They were rather ridiculous, with their childish vanity. She could hardly keep serious when she thought of what had happened to Ignaz. Once he made every woman lose her heart, and now he was proud to be the father of the little daughter Mariedl had given him. He played with her from morning till night and nothing made him happier than to be told that she looked like him. He sang her to sleep and played the zither for her. Mariedl, still heavy from her pregnancy, looked on with half-closed, dreamy eyes. At last her dream was realized: there was no need any longer to keep an eye on him. Every time she gave the breast to her child he came to look on as though it was a miracle specially devised for his own benefit.

To have power over a man, to make him suffer in consequence, this alone seemed to Angélique worth living for. One should not be so foolish as to fall in love, because then one was the victim. No, in future Angélique would beware. The red-haired son of the apothecary, at any rate, was her property. She could subject him to any kind of humiliation. She had seen him a few times during the summer and she wrote to him that she hoped soon to call at Klagenfurt and would bring her violin with her. Now at last she felt that her practising was not thrown away. These musical meetings would provide an excuse for excursions that might otherwise not have been so easily permitted. She visited the young man a few times and when he was all afire for her she invited him to the castle. Every one would now hear the difficult sonatas they were already able to play together. She called it a musical soiree and tried to make the others accept her new word. The Major thought it was all rather ridiculous. He never could take Angélique and her whims very seriously.

He was certainly not highly impressed with the pale freckled young

man who did all he could to behave in accordance with the rules of etiquette and began by upsetting his wineglass. Georg looked highly annoyed at his daughter for introducing this clumsy person into the house. She had always been somewhat of a mystery to him, but at least he had imagined that she possessed a native pride. Angélique had her own kind of pride, which appeared by an ironical glance, as though she challenged her father's silent criticism. After dinner she took up her violin with complete self-possession, while Ludwig Mayer sat down at the grand piano.

The difficult sonatas were not exactly a success. Ludwig's hands perspired with nervousness and slipped on the keys. He was used to an upright piano and the full, rich tones of this instrument appeared to startle him. He tried to play more softly, but as a result Angélique lost touch and ran ahead of him by half a beat. He tried to catch her up and in the effort his fingers tripped over one another. He stared with wide open eyes at the notes although at home he was able to play the sonata by heart.

"This movement again," ordered Angélique disdainfully. It amused her to notice that her father rose from his chair and retired to the library with a newspaper. Ludwig shrank together as though he had been whipped and his shaking hand turned several pages at once.

Elisabeth felt sorry for him. "I believe you merely use him as a butt," she said after he left.

"What else can I do with him?"

"Perhaps he is too good for such things."

Angélique did not answer at once. She took off her frock and carefully hung it away. Then she said: "No man is too good for that."

Elisabeth decided not to discuss this point with her: "I should say, perhaps, that you should consider yourself too good for this game."

"Did you notice how much he is in love with me?" asked Angélique. Her sister nodded.

"Well. . . . It's always nice to have someone so much in love with one, even if he's only the red-haired son of a chemist."

"Even if you feel nothing for him, you must have realized how painful it was."

"But perhaps I shall never feel anything for a man. That's what's the matter with me!"

Elisabeth turned with big eyes to her younger sister. "Where do you get these queer notions, when you're only eighteen? You talk as though you had everything behind you!"

Angélique applied her old favourite tactics. She gave no reply, turned away, and stepped into bed. Elisabeth could not fall asleep.

She was upset by Angélique's idiotic professions. But could one take such declarations seriously, coming from her? Had not Angélique tried merely to impress her? She appeared always to consider that she suffered from an injustice. Was she too lonely in this house? Papa did not care for her, but she seemed never to miss an opportunity to irritate him. Perhaps her emotional life had got into a blind alley from which she could not extricate herself. If this were true it would be better to help her than to condemn her. As though Angélique would ever accept any one's help! She always shut and bolted the door in one's nose.

Even if Rudi had not been punished the Viennese excursion in the spring of 1913 would not have taken place. There was much disquiet as a result of the Balkan war which proved so disastrous for Turkey. Russian troop concentrations in Asia Minor caused something of a panic in the dual monarchy and all military leave was cancelled. Georg read the newspapers with growing concern. Was there really going to be a clash one day between the great civilized powers of Europe?

The Lorraine lawyer, Raymond Poincaré, had become President of France, and in his country and in Germany rearmament was proceeding at a feverish pace. If Russia were to make a move in Asia Minor . . . ! Surely she would consider the consequences before she invaded Armenia. But a fatal and unintentional explosion was always a possibility. Europe, chained together and divided at the same time by treaties into two hostile camps, could easily be set aflame by the arrogance of a drunken cossack leader on the Turkish frontier. There was a party in Austria, continually growing in power, which insisted upon a preventive war against Serbia before it had recovered from its fight with Turkey. And when Georg thought of Russia, growing stronger every year, he had to admit in his heart . . . But there was another voice, too, in his heart. The thought of his son made it difficult for him to judge clearly and impartially.

As could easily have been predicted, a quarrel arose about the sharing of the Turkish booty. With its insatiable lust for power Serbia demanded a large piece of Macedonia which had been allotted to its ally Bulgaria. Roumania, which had taken no part in the war, and saw its neighbours grow larger and stronger, took the opportunity to demand territory on the Dobrudja from Bulgaria in the hour of her need. The Greeks were also keen on joining in the fray. In this manner Bulgaria suddenly saw itself surrounded by enemies and it was not difficult to predict that Serbia would once more leave the battlefield considerably richer. Meanwhile in several lands of the monarchy it became necessary to resist the Pan-Slav idea with which Russia was trying to undermine the Hapsburg empire.

It sometimes appeared as though the whole artificial edifice were kept standing only by the tall, sacred person of the white-haired Emperor. He was eighty-three now. What would happen after his death? Was it from the knowledge that he could not be spared that he drew his superhuman strength and clung to his post?

During the summer things became easier. The war party in Austria tried to persuade the two allies, Germany and Italy, that this moment was favourable for action against Serbia. But the answer was a double refusal.

Von Brandt did not go away on a holiday. He prepared the dissertation with which he hoped to take his doctor's degree the following spring. He told Papa that if he were successful he hoped soon to get a post as lecturer at Munich. Some of the professors were very favourably disposed towards him. This meant that he would not stay another full year at Maria-Licht. No one, Elisabeth least of all, doubted for one moment that he would be successful at his examination. There had been a moment when something like friendship seemed to exist between her and von Brandt, but then he intentionally withdrew himself and returned to a more formal relationship. After she had got over her first feelings of resentment she tried to explain his attitude to herself. It seemed to her that von Brandt worried about his chances of success, and Elisabeth did her best to prove to him that she realized the importance and the seriousness of his work. She did not want to stand in its way on any account. She believed that the situation as it existed now satisfied her; she could see him every day and she knew that he was near. But the thought that he would leave Maria-Licht destroyed her sense of rest and security. She could not picture life here without him.

She thought of a plan. It came to her during a lonely walk and gradually began to fill all her thoughts. She wanted to continue her studies in the classical languages and she thought of telling him this in the spring and of appealing for his advice and guidance. She thought that in this manner there would remain a link between them. Moreover, this system would perhaps turn her into something more than what she was now, a mere pupil at Maria-Licht, an Austrian girl who might to-day or to-morrow marry an officer or a big landlord.

Rudi was the only one she told of her plans. He was rather amused by them, and replied that he wanted to know more about the landowner or the officer she intended to marry soon. It was the first time in her life that she felt misunderstood by her brother. How could he be so stupid! But there was one intelligent question in his letter. He asked what would be the future of Stephan's education after Herr von Brandt's departure. Papa did not know yet what to do with Stephan, and he was ill-advised enough to wait for what Mama wanted to happen. Was she still intent upon making him a priest? One thing

was sure, Mama had never mentioned the plan to Stephan himself. Ever since the story of Arnim's duel Stephan talked of one thing only, of the fact that he was going to be an officer too. When Bleriot flew across the Channel Stephan constructed model aeroplanes with the assistance of Ignaz and he announced that one day he would be a famous aviator with his portrait in all the papers. When the *Titanic* went down, Stephan became convinced that there was only one career open to a man, that he should die as a Marconist sending out messages while, women and children first, the passengers were assisted into the boats. He could only have conceived an interest for an ecclesiastical career if he had been told of the life of missionaries and of their dangerous task in wild countries. A vocation to the priesthood could have been nurtured in him in one way only: by talking of lions and tigers, of snakes and of cannibals.

In the winter Maestro Fantini reappeared to coach the girls in the latest dances of the season in time for their journey to Vienna. Time was growing short. Spring frocks would have to be ordered in Vienna immediately after the New Year. Maria had also to think of clothes for herself. She felt that this journey would tax her strength overmuch, but she did not want to give way. In her terrible doubts about Stephan she hoped at any rate to be able to soothe her conscience by fulfilling her maternal duties towards two grown-up daughters. The visit to Vienna demanded all her strength and all her attention, and this was a sufficient excuse not to take up immediately the burning question of Stephan's future. How could she go into two matters at once? Perhaps God would reveal his will to her when he saw how difficult she found it to reach a decision.

A seamstress came from Klagenfurt to assist in the making of clothes for Maria. She had worn the same old clothes for years, but now, for the sake of the girls, she had to appear at her best. And, as she was being measured and fitted under the critical eyes of her daughters, something of the old interest in dress revived in her. She caught herself wondering where a ribbon ought to be placed, or how this or that frock made her look. She did not want Georg to feel ashamed of her, and she thought also that it was getting time for him to go to his tailor. He felt rather surprised when she told him, and he promised at once that he would go to Klagenfurt the next day.

Elisabeth rejoiced at this unexpected renewal of interest on the part of her mother, and even ventured to encourage her vanity. "How young you look, Mama! Your hair is grey, but to look at your face no one would believe that you have such big daughters! Don't dress like an old lady when you go to Vienna; people would laugh at you." Perhaps the word was not too happily chosen. Maria looked frightened, and Elisabeth suddenly realized that her colour was due

to animation and not to better health. The fire in her eyes was not recaptured youth, but feverish agitation.

A fortnight before their departure the frocks from Vienna were delivered by post. Elisabeth looked equally nice in everything. There was a pink toilette with wide sleeves and a broad-brimmed hat garnished with spring flowers, and in this she was the picture of spring itself. Angélique was envious: her own type was a special one, she thought, and it could not be suited by anything that looked well on the average woman. Although she was the younger sister, those girlish clothes seemed too childish for her. She felt distressed because none of the new clothes looked right. She said she would stay behind with Stephan, and it took all Aunt Frieda's patient persuasion to bring her back to reason.

The classes at Maria-Licht had somewhat suffered during the last few weeks, but Elisabeth was convinced that Herr von Brandt would not mind because it gave him all the more time for working at his thesis. Perhaps she was a little sorry that he seemed too busy even to have a look at her frocks. Did he perhaps mind it all the same that in her excitement about the journey to Vienna she neglected her lessons just a little? But surely he would understand? She was still a girl! His indifference made her feel rebellious. She told herself with a kind of bitter satisfaction that he could not bear being in the background even for a short period. All the better, for now he would know how Elisabeth sometimes felt! But however busy he was, he did not like to refuse to see them off, together with Aunt Frieda and Stephan, on the day of their departure. On the platform Stephan was hardly able to keep down the tears of regret because he was not allowed to go as well. "Next time, when you are a little bigger," Georg promised him. He thought it would be good for Maria to be parted a short while from her son. This would give her a little time for reflection. She found it exceedingly difficult to leave Stephan, and Aunt Frieda had to bite her lips when she saw how passionately Maria pressed the boy against her. At last she said to Maria: "Aren't we foolish—it's only for a few weeks!" Remarkably enough Elisabeth was at that moment feeling precisely the same need for explaining to Herr von Brandt that she would be back in a couple of weeks. He nodded with a curious expression in his eyes, like a mixture of regret and irony. "Do enjoy yourself," he said with a sudden access of cordiality. She was struck by the tone in which he spoke. There was something almost protecting about it. A medley of sentiments assailed her. She would have liked to stay and return home with Stephan and Aunt Frieda and him. She felt as though this Viennese journey were something irrelevant, a folly which she would one day regret. But how could she go back? The train began to move, she rushed to the next window in order to wave and it was only just before

the train turned the bend that she noticed the handkerchiefs of Stephan and of Aunt Frieda.

Angélique had made sure of a corner seat. Her eyes were aglow with the fire of adventure. She had already attracted the attention of a lonely traveller, a man whose temples were turning grey and whose figure was still youthful. He was standing in the corridor smoking a cigarette, and his eyes kept wandering towards the young girl with the dark eyes that had an expression of secret triumph.

Maria wiped away her tears with her little handkerchief and drew her veil over her delicate but already deadly-tired face. And Georg looked at his golden hunter: "At five thirty-eight to-night we shall be in Vienna."

CHAPTER TWELVE

METROPOLIS

ON the platform in Vienna Rudi walked towards them with a happy smile on his face. Arnim was there as well, with his parents and his two sisters, but they remained discreetly near the exit. Von Strada and his wife invited Georg and Maria into their carriage. The young people distributed themselves into two cabs.

Arnim's mother was a well-preserved woman of fifty, still full of spirits; it was clear that she had been a celebrated beauty in her time. She took pity on Maria at once, and suggested that they should call each other by their first names. Hers was Louise, she said, and she added that she was full of plans for these two weeks. But a glance at Maria told her that she might as well scratch half the items on the programme. A feeling of motherly protectiveness arose in her towards this grey-haired and slightly pathetic wife of the retired Major: "We'll take it all very quietly, you know! To begin with you'll have to have a good rest in our house. I hope you'll feel entirely at home."

"I feel at home already," said Maria softly.

Georg found it less easy to establish contact with his host, the typical, elegant, refined Viennese officer, with hair grey like his own, but who was airy and sceptical and wore his uniform not as a soldier but for its decorative effect. Each made the other feel ill at ease. Georg's ingenuous earnestness was bound to depress his host more and more every day. Freiherr von Strada himself considered it highly unfair that with his facile conception of duty he had risen to the rank of colonel on the general staff, and that he stood a good chance of further promotion, while his friend . . . Was it only due to the difference of ten or twelve years in their age that he felt as though this major from the provinces was his superior? Not knowing what else to discuss with von Weygand, he talked shop and tried at once to attune himself to Georg's severe conceptions of military life. But he did not deceive himself, and realized that his guest too saw through the sham.

Arnim's younger sister insisted that she should be left to share a cab alone with Angélique. Or was this perhaps a stroke of policy on Arnim's part? It would have been natural for him to chaperon the two youngest girls. Rudi, of course, would like to have Elisabeth and Vera with him.

Angélique was surprised herself to notice how little she now minded

the humiliation Arnim had inflicted upon her at the time of the duel. She listened with one ear to the excited chatter of Mizzi, a plump seventeen-year-old blonde, but meanwhile she tried to look unobtrusively out of the carriage in order to absorb a preliminary impression of Vienna. Mizzi noticed this and said: "Here by the station it isn't very interesting but presently we get to Hietzing, where the Emperor lives, and we also." The last words she added without any intention of bragging.

Angélique noted the fact in silence. She was determined not to show any surprise, in order to give Mizzi and her sister no chance of treating her like a little provincial. But for Mizzi the whole fun of this visit was precisely the chance it gave her of being able to patronize her new friend. "I'll show Vienna to you!" she promised. "What a pity that it's already dark. But to-morrow morning we'll be here again: we're lunching in the Prater. We'll go to Kriau or to the Lusthaus. I think the Lusthaus, because there you don't get so many old generals and other antiques. And then in the afternoon we're off to Dehmél on the Kohlmarkt . . . I'm sure you've heard of those places."

"Oh, yes," said Angélique.

"Maybe you'll come across one of our arch-dukes there. That would be luck! The boys are not coming with us, because they must go and practise for next Saturday. But in the evening they'll go out with us, perhaps we'll go to a Heurige. Remember that you're not to mention it for the time being." She laughed. "It's grand there. You can dance too. I think we'll be able to get there, if we take Fritzl with us. He's such a good stupid boy whom Mama trusts implicitly because he's going to be a diplomat and because he always goes out with his mother. He's just a little bit in love with me. . . ."

She interrupted her chatter for a moment in order to see how Angélique would react. Angélique was unable to keep back a smile when she saw the triumphant expression in Mizzi's eyes. This encouraged the girl and she continued: "You're sleeping with me to-night. What a lot we'll have to tell one another! I want to hear from you precisely how you live out there in the country. It seems so lovely to me, I think I'd like always to live in the country. Arnim never stopped talking about those big woods round your house, and about those lovely swims in the lake. Do you sometimes go swimming with boys? Are there many boys?"

Angélique could not answer all these question at once; besides, Mizzi gave her no chance. "Look, that's Schönbrunn!" she said, and she bent through the window as far as she could, to look with Angélique at the tall lighted windows of the Imperial Palace, as though she were a little provincial herself. A moment later the carriages turned into an iron gate almost as impressive as that of the Imperial

Palace and stopped outside a dignified-looking house in the Maria Theresa style with a pompous outer staircase. Two hounds ran barking from the back garden. An old manservant opened the gate and sent two chambermaids down to take in the luggage. Arnim settled with the cab drivers and to amuse Elisabeth he talked with them in genuine Viennese. Meanwhile, the carriage was being driven into the coach-house.

The house was like a little palace, with its glittering marble stairs, its tapestries, its heavy carpets and old paintings, and it received the visitors with a flood of electric light and opulent warmth. The von Stradas did not realize the staggering effect made by this refined urban wealth upon the guests from Carinthia. Only Rudi understood it completely. Elisabeth looked round in dumb astonishment. Angélique did her best to behave as though it were all very usual, but Rudi saw that she was feeling shy and overawed. Louise von Strada laughed and chattered animatedly as she walked ahead to show them their rooms.

This was Elisabeth's first opportunity to have a good look at her hostess. The two daughters were certainly not plain but they could not compare with such a mother. She knew from Rudi that before her marriage Arnim's mother was on the stage. Some photographs in the drawing-room showed her in parts which she was proud to remember. Elisabeth did not find it difficult to imagine that she had been an actress: her voice and every one of her movements radiated an easy charm and her whole being had something confident and restful at the same time. It was as though Mama felt how she contrasted with this bundle of sparkling vitality. She walked self-consciously by her side, confessing her defeat with a slightly tired little smile.

Angélique thoroughly enjoyed the luxury into which she was suddenly plunged. The thought of Maria-Licht with its paraffin lamps and its candelabra, its old-fashioned washing-stands and its worn-out stone floors, filled her with repulsion. Mizzi, proud of the hospitality she could offer, asked her whether she would not care to have a bath before dinner. Always ready for new experiences, and also in order to show that she knew that a bath was *de rigueur* after a long journey, she accepted at once. Mizzi locked the bathroom door that communicated with her sister's room and allowed the warm water to flow into the bath. When her guest was already almost undressed she came in again with a sponge, a vast downy bath-towel and a bottle of bath salts. She said that she was on no account to use the bottle on the dressing-table because that was Vera's. She also showed how the douche worked, which made Angélique feel very small. As soon as Mizzi had gone she bolted the door and stepped with a little shiver of delight into the blueish water. It covered her

body like a warm caress. She stretched out and peered between her eyelashes at the white shimmer of the tiles on the wall, and forgot time and place until Mizzi knocked at the door and asked her whether she was still alive and whether she didn't want to get out because the gong would go in a quarter of an hour and she would have to dress for dinner. It was difficult to get up. She felt that these were the things for which she had longed throughout her existence. At home all bathing was done in a zinc hip-bath and Papa never allowed the use of warm water for the purpose. Only hard towels with which one rubbed one's skin red were allowed.

Mizzi chose to make no comment on the fact that Angélique had shut the bathroom door in her face. She had unpacked Angélique's trunk and put away her frocks in the cupboard. She was able therefore to say how much she admired them and she knew actually by the look of them where they had been ordered. She was appalled at the complete absence of perfume and cosmetics. She felt genuinely sorry for Angélique and generously offered her the use of the ample supplies on her own dressing-table. "Don't you use any at all in the country? But what do you do then when you go to a ball?" asked Mizzi, completely puzzled. Angélique gave no reply. She merely shrugged her shoulders with a slightly aggrieved smile. But she showed herself a willing though somewhat shy pupil. During the last five minutes before the gong went Mizzi was able to make her look a little more sophisticated. Her soft and deft little fingers made rapid movements over Angélique's face, and she uttered little cries of delight at the results. Angélique wondered what her father would say when he saw her.

She tried not to look at him when she came down to dinner just a minute or so after the others. He glanced at her with vague surprise, trying to find the reason for the change he noticed in his daughter. Elisabeth, of course, saw at once what was the matter but her own conscience was not entirely clear. Upstairs Vera had persuaded her that she needed some assistance in dressing and in making her toilet.

The conversation at table was merry and animated. There were other sides to von Strada than that which appeared when he talked about the service with the old Major in the carriage and in the smoking-room. He now displayed a youthful, merry wit, especially when skirmishing with his son. Georg had to grow accustomed to the familiarity with which these two addressed each other. At first he could hardly believe his ears. Was this how children and parents conversed nowadays? Ought he to feel ashamed because down there in the country he clung to an antiquated system of education? At heart he still considered his own system preferable, but there was no denying that he felt something like envy of this greater intimacy, this comradely and mutual ease between father and son. He had tried to

be an example to his children by practising the severest self-restraint. He demanded and obtained their respect, but in his loftiness he stood isolated. At a moment like this he felt it sharply. Elisabeth alone had learned to understand him. But now he suddenly wondered to what extent Rudi's feelings of respect, or even awe, left room for any affection. Von Strada and his son seemed to be comrades with equal rights and the father took the freest replies with a laugh. Did he not want to preserve any authority? And was he not afraid of any consequences? Or did it appear easier to him not to reflect at all, and had he hopes of winning a second youth in this manner? But he could no longer be said to be young! What would happen to the world if older people refused to carry the burden of their years?

During the conversation Georg's eyes wandered over his own three children. There they sat, with well-bred smiles, but unable to contribute anything to the conversation. Arnim, his parents, and his two sisters kept the ball rolling. Sometimes their talk became so excited that they all spoke at once. It would be foolish to deny that these Viennese children had more inner freedom than his own. And he had a vague sensation that his own children envied them this freedom. Sometimes Rudi tried to copy the airy manner of his friend, but one detected immediately that there was something not genuine about the attempt, just as it was equally impossible for him to put into his voice that imperceptible Viennese accent in which the others allowed themselves to be carried away now and then. In this jealousy of his children Georg suddenly recognized his own jealousy of thirty years ago. How relieved he had felt when he was at last able to leave Vienna and to retire into the country, where he could be himself. He was proud to become a farmer and a country squire, but at the same time he never failed to realize that his retreat was something of a flight. In the eyes of his first wife he had never been able to rival those Viennese officers who had courted her with such innocent impudence, and without seeming to fear his dark anger. They all seemed born with that sparkling mind and that natural gift for making a woman merry. As for himself, the only effect he seemed to have upon his wife was to depress her. Was he perhaps also the real culprit, the person who was finally responsible for the profound and almost unnatural melancholy of Maria? Might another man have found it possible to make her forget Stephan's death? He experienced a strange sensation that evening, while all around him laughed and even Maria listened with a smile at Arnim as he gave a new version of his duel. As Arnim was now telling the story it became a foolish and irresponsible act of sparrow shooting early in the morning in the little wood near Budapest. He caricatured himself and his opponent,

two half-grown-up boys pretending they were men. Georg found it difficult not to let his attention wander.

After dinner Arnim absolutely wanted to show the Ring to the girls, but his parents insisted that this was not his last chance. Why not stay together in the drawing-room? Elisabeth would have liked best of all to be alone with Rudi, for whom she still had so many questions. She was afraid that during this Viennese holiday he would only lend half an ear to her. His eyes continually went to Vera, who accepted his quiet homage with vanity but also, it seemed, with a certain nonchalance. Sometimes she rewarded him with a meaningless smile. Elisabeth could not account for the irritation she felt at this little smile. Was it mere jealousy? She put the question to herself in earnest, ready at once to eradicate such an unworthy sentiment from her heart. She adored her brother and demanded the same worship from the person he elected. At twenty-two he was so manly, so attractive, and at the same time he was so straight and so kind that any girl should be glad to have him, even a girl called Vera. And yet Vera was behaving as though Rudi was only just good enough for her. Had she been spoilt, or was she merely stupid? It was as though she tried all the time to give the impression that there was nothing very serious between Rudi and herself. Of course they were not yet formally engaged. For this they would have to wait at least till Rudi had become a first lieutenant. But surely this was no reason for Vera to treat his feelings as though they did not really matter? Did she look upon him as a mere flirt? Elisabeth thought it was better to suspend her judgment. Rudi would naturally not tolerate a critical remark about the girl he loved. Yes, this was what she must guard against if she were left alone with him! It was on no account to happen. Supposing he left for Czernowitz with a secret grievance against his sister and stayed away like that for a whole year! Would she ever be able to bear it?

As Elisabeth's eyes wandered from one member of the company to another, they met the glance of the hostess. She was struck by the intelligence of these friendly eyes. She blushed. It was as though the Colonel's wife saw through her criticism of Vera. But the hostess did not seem to mind: her eyes remained full of warm sympathy. At night before they retired, when Louise von Strada was alone with her husband, she said: "If Arnim was not a little too young to discuss such serious matters, I would try to-morrow to make him realize that in the whole of Vienna there would be no better wife for him than that blonde girl from Carinthia. That such a girl still goes about without a fiancé is about the best proof you could find that men are stupid. She has so many qualities and she's splendid-looking too. If she were my daughter and I could dress her, you would see what I mean."

The Colonel was full of his own thoughts. There were still two weeks to be spent with the Major, and he wondered how he would live through them. He did not reply much. He was used to his wife's discoveries on the subject of masculine shortcomings, which invariably included his own, and which were usually communicated at this time of the day. But in this connection he had to admit that she was perfectly justified. The girl was a beauty and there was no doubt that she would be one in a thousand for Arnim. But he was certain already that when the time came for his son to make a choice he would jump at the chance of making a blunder. Many years ago he had himself been on the point of committing the same kind of mistake, but Louise's energy saved him from it. However, it was hardly the moment to remind her of this.

Elisabeth and Vera tried to practise the greatest reserve while undressing together, and to hide the intuitive distrust they felt towards each other. But in the other room Mizzi threw off all her clothes without the slightest shyness, which compelled Angélique to be equally unconcerned. She did not want to give herself away completely to this younger girl, but her resistance was already weakening and she found it impossible to keep up her pretence of superiority. Mizzi considered that the hour for confidences had arrived. "What do you think of my sister?" she asked. But she was not the kind of girl to wait for a reply. "She imagines that she can treat me as a child merely because of the two years' difference between us! Is your sister like that too? You needn't be afraid, they can't hear anything, the bathroom is between us. Do you think Vera is better-looking than I am? She's always so secretive, she never tells anything about herself, but I know quite a lot about her all the same! If Rudi knew her better he wouldn't even look at her!"

Angélique just wondered whether Mizzi would have preferred Rudi to look a little more at her. But this, apparently, was not the case. Mizzi was merely annoyed at her sister's success and wanted to say something nasty about her. As she put her frock in the cupboard, she turned the conversation and said how much she admired Angélique's clothes. She displayed her own spring frocks and expressed her contemptuous disapproval of the latest fashion with its impossibly narrow skirts and the hats that sank over one's eyes like a flower-pot. Mizzi loved wide-brimmed hats beneath which she could display her gold-blond hair, and wide skirts that floated round one during waltzes. And suddenly, passing to a whispered tone, she asked whether Angélique could dance the tango. She could do it, but Papa and Mama were not to know.

With a laugh she dropped her last garment on the floor and flung her night-gown over her head. As the delicate material slipped down with a rustling sound, Angélique had just time to see with envy that

Mizzi's body was rosy and fair like that of Elisabeth. If she had been like this herself she would not have minded showing herself in the least. Perhaps she might even have wished to show off her nakedness like Mizzi. But she was dark, and she knew that her whole body betrayed her passionate temperament. No, not in all this fortnight would she give away the secret of her nakedness to this impertinent little seventeen-year-old. She suddenly felt much older than the Viennese girl, even though in some respects the latter might have a certain advantage over her. Mizzi was appalled at her night-gown and at her underclothes, and generously offered her some of her own. But Angélique would not hear of it. Later, in the intimate light of the little lamp on the night table, Mizzi tried to impress Angélique with her experiences in the domain of love. Angélique pretended she believed her but she knew she was lying.

All her ardent curiosity went out to the elder girl, to Vera. The self-assured smile of Vera while her adoring Rudi looked at her that evening during dinner fascinated Angélique. "And your sister?" she asked Mizzi. "Weren't you going to say that before Rudi there had been others?"

Mizzi looked at her with mysterious and solemn hesitation. "Once she went very far indeed," she admitted.

The vagueness of Mizzi's words strengthened Angélique's suspicions about Vera. Oh, Mizzi need not be afraid that she was going to tell her brother anything. She felt a secret enjoyment at the thought that Rudi too was stupid, Rudi towards whom Elisabeth looked up as though he were wisdom itself. Yes, they were all stupid.

The following morning they drove to the Prater in beautiful spring weather in an open coach. Papa and Mama stayed at home with the von Stradas. But Fritz von Guggenheimer, the Fritzl of whom Mizzi had spoken the day before, arrived in the large carriage of his mother to fetch the young ladies from Carinthia, of whom he had heard so much from Arnim. Mizzi gave him an exuberant reception, as though to show Angélique that she knew how to treat Fritzl. Angélique would not have failed to draw her own conclusions within five minutes. Almost immediately he revealed to her what was the great worry in a life that appeared at first sight to be entirely cloudless. It was the difficulty he experienced every day in finding a sufficient number of pleasures to help him forget his diplomatic studies and the fact that he hated them so much. Every Viennese matron considered Fritzl to be an ideal son. He regularly accompanied his mother in her afternoon outings. Mizzi teasingly congratulated him on his perfection, and he answered with a sigh that he knew already what were his merits: she was telling him nothing new. His face recovered its air of beatitude when he enumerated a dozen different ways in which

they could spend the morning, but each objection made him a little gloomier. Not only Mizzi but every girl he knew was in the habit of laughing at him, and it was in his manner of bearing this that he showed his real greatness. The only thing he could not stand was to be ignored, and his life was dominated by a horror of solitude. It assailed him sometimes in the midst of a merry company, if no one happened to be talking to him and there also was no one to talk to. Then a profound depression descended over him, his eyes became sad, and his tired face seemed to belong to a man of seventy rather than to a youngster of twenty-three.

This morning, however, the world presented itself to him in a new and joyful appearance. Yesterday he might still have been a tiny bit in love with Mizzi, but to-day his heart leaped out to Elisabeth, without hesitation or pretence. Arnim had to administer a punch in his back to tell him not to be an ass. He had better see with whom he was dealing. Afraid to lose even a second of his valuable time, Fritzl turned with the same impetuosity towards Angélique. Her playful smile encouraged him, though he would have liked to know for certain whether it was supreme refinement or rustic lack of guile. If he had a chance of being alone with her for a moment, he intended to become sentimental, in the first place because this was always least risky, and in the second place because, as it happened, he was a sentimentalist by nature. He was in the habit of imagining that he could not live without one girl or another, whoever it might happen to be, and now he felt the moment drawing near when he would be seriously in love with Angélique. He was already looking with growing discomfort towards the moment when they would arrive at the Lusthaus: then he would have to expose his innocent protégée to the searching glances of the commissionnaires. Clearly, they would have to choose a somewhat isolated table.

They drove along the Opern-Ring, along the Burgtheater, through the Karntnerstrasse. In a stream of confused words Fritzl tried to point out to Angélique all the famous cafés, wine dives, pastry shops and monuments which they passed. Once the carriage left the Rotenturmstrasse and the Danube was crossed, Vienna ceased to exist. At least, Fritzl did not deem it necessary to mention anything else and he was able now to pass to an esoteric explanation of the places he had pointed out earlier in the drive. He told of arch-ducal and other scandals and of recent history, which seemed also to be a series of scandals, although Meister Kirschbaum had entirely failed to reveal this to Angélique. Mizzi appeared to know all these things and sometimes contributed a confirmatory detail. They reached the Praterstern and the Hauptallee, with the Wurstelprater on the left and on the right. Fritzl swore that he would know no rest until he had revealed to them the joys of this Wurstelprater and he took the

opportunity for the first time secretly to touch Angélique's knee. He discovered to his amazement that this made her blush, which was more than he had dared to hope!

After they passed the shooting booths and the famous giant wheel, green meadows and groups of tall trees appeared on both sides of the road, and now Fritzl grew very busy waving at passing carriages or saluting them respectfully. He seemed to know the whole world and tried to intimidate Angélique by announcing at a distance who were the owners of the carriages that were drawing near, whether they belonged to some dignified ancient nobility, to a new-fangled countess with a doubtful reputation, or to an ill-mannered *nouveau riche*. He told the coachman to take to the left in order to show Angélique the famous rotunda of the world exhibition, and he explained to her that, like the Crystal Palace in London, those glass structures had the advantage of never catching fire. They must also visit the Kriau, where no bourgeois would ever venture. It was one of the few places where one could still be sure of being among one's own people. Not, of course, that this mattered very much to Fritzl. He was in favour of democracy as long as it was a merry democracy. Nevertheless he whispered the word into Angélique's ear lest the coachman might have heard it.

They drove on to the stables of the racing course of Freudenau, surrounded by trees, where Rudi and Arnim wanted to show their horses. Then they returned to the Lusthaus for lunch. Fritzl clapped his hands noisily and ordered "Mehankipfel" cream, apple tart and honey for the whole company. All the tables around them in front of the high windows through which the warm and blinding sun poured in were occupied by friends and acquaintances. Some of them Fritzl greeted with such delight that one could hardly believe he had met them in the same place the day before and every morning before that. He went to kiss the hands of a merry company of ladies and poured out an avalanche of compliments, in the hope that Angélique would not fail to notice it. There was a little group of young officers whom he tried to wave away with an indifferent and slightly bored gesture, but this was enough to make them all rise and greet him with special cordiality, so that he had to introduce them to the new-comers.

In a moment the table was surrounded by uniforms. Tables were moved close to theirs and others joined the fast-growing group uninvited. Inquisitive girls also joined them. Elisabeth and Angélique fought bravely not to betray their shyness. Everybody here seemed to know every one else. They all called one another by their first name, they conversed at a pace that was almost impossible to follow, and discussed the latest successes of actors, opera singers, authors and musicians, whose names were unknown to the girls from Carinthia. The coffee and the sweets that were now being served had

a soothing effect, and the passionate discussion changed into a twitter of light talk, in which they found themselves agreeing about the extravagant conduct of a demi-mondaine to whom they referred by a malicious nickname, and about the excessive confidence of the elderly count who kept her. Then the conversation turned upon imperial favour and disfavour, about an absentee officer, and about a debt of honour that had not been paid in time.

Elisabeth was grateful that the tempestuous interest shown at first in herself and her sister had subsided, but Angélique was struggling against a growing resentment. She envied all these girls who lived in Vienna and were able to take part every day in such a gathering. It humiliated her that she had to stay so entirely outside the conversation. She thought that she knew enough about literature and about music and composers, but the names she picked out here were names of to-day and to-morrow that were not to be found in any treatise or hand-book. Probably a number of them would never find their way there, but what did it matter, at present they were the talk of the town, and she wondered what the others around them would have said had they known that she and her sister had never yet been to a theatre. Oh, it was by far wiser not to speak at all or to listen with a distant smile as though she might easily have said what she thought if only she had felt like it. After a while this mysterious and almost ironical silence did not fail to have its effect: Angélique noticed with satisfaction that some of the young men tried to catch her eye before they proclaimed their views.

Elisabeth's thoughts wandered away. She remembered that this morning she wanted to write a post card to Stephan and to Aunt Frieda and also one to Herr von Brandt. As soon as she was alone she would do it. She did want to be alone for a moment. There was also something else that worried her. A few times she had seen Vera's glance wandering away as though in a fit of absent-mindedness to a dark strongly-built lieutenant of the Honved-Hussars, who was sitting by himself at a little table and did not seem to know any one. His manly appearance, his aristocratic profile with just a few hairs turning grey on his brown temples, seemed to fascinate other girls as well. But he paid hardly any attention to them. When at last he rose in order to leave the room, he managed to make his way close by Vera's chair, and for a second he looked into her eyes in a way that made her turn pale. Rudi, who sat by her side, noticed nothing. Elisabeth was annoyed at herself for having been so observant. She was not a spy, she did not want to spy even in the service of her beloved brother. She was so ready to make herself blind to everything, if only she could have made sure that Rudi was not!

How long would they still have to stay here? When the clock struck half-past eleven, Fritzl remembered that he still had to show

Angélique the changing of the guard at the Hofburg. They would have to hurry in order to be in time.

During the drive to town the Hungarian lieutenant passed them. Rudi and Arnim saluted him, while Fritzl failed to notice him because his attention had just been drawn by an open carriage with three ladies buried under their ostrich feathers. In returning the salute, the Hungarian, his hand nonchalantly at his cap, bent forward a little in the saddle in order to be able better to look into their carriage. Elisabeth quickly looked away. Mizzi secretly nudged Angélique. Angélique drew no other conclusion than that Mizzi wanted to draw her attention to the attractive manly appearance of the slightly older horseman. But later near the Hofburg, when all the others were absorbed by the motley and festive spectacle of the changing of the guard, Mizzi took advantage of the thunder of the drums and of the military music quickly to whisper into Angélique's ear: "This Hungarian officer, he is Vera's latest flame!"

And as Angélique looked surprised and a little incredulous, Mizzi added in a whisper: "Didn't you notice him? They've all noticed it except . . ." With her chin she pointed a little contemptuously at Rudi's back.

For a second Angélique felt like taking her brother's side and warning him. Her sense of honour was offended at the thought that her brother was an object of general mockery. But of course Rudi would not even believe her! If he had to be proud as well as stupid, he would have to bear the consequences himself.

Meanwhile she registered the fact that, if Mizzi spoke the truth, something had escaped her attention which all the others had noticed in the midst of their passionate debates. Angélique promised herself that on another occasion she would not allow herself to be so totally absorbed by the conversation. Also she concluded that, after all, the conversation had apparently not been taken quite so seriously by the others as, in her feeling of inferiority, she had imagined.

They arrived home late because a procession of strikers held them up in the Mariahilferstrasse. Fritzl, the secret democrat, turned red with anger at the sight of it. It was a crying shame, he thought, that these plebs should be given the free run of Vienna! During lunch, Georg asked what the police would have done if the Emperor happened to have decided to drive from Schönbrunn to the Hofburg at another hour than the usual. Elisabeth was very quiet: the spectacle, a novel one for her, had deeply shocked her. She still saw before her eyes these masses of ill-clad and ill-fed men, with their idle hands threateningly in their pockets, looking round with eyes in which the fire of hatred and rebelliousness was glowing. Around them she had noticed the police, whose somewhat exaggerated gestures seemed to hide a certain nervousness. A police officer came running towards the

carriage in order to tell them that they would have to wait, but when he noticed the frightened faces of the girls he tried to reassure them by telling them that it meant nothing. But was it really nothing? Was not a human injustice revealed here that could not be undone by the police with their drawn swords? It appalled her to think that her world was still dominated by brute force, and she was surprised to find that Papa and all the others thought it a good world. When she thought of this morning in the Prater, with its unreal emptiness, she felt she understood even less. She felt a great desire to talk about these things with Herr von Brandt.

Immediately after the meal she retired to her room to write post cards. What she would have liked best would have been to confess to her teacher that she wished she were back at Maria-Licht. But without knowing precisely what actuated her she began to give an excited description of the adventures of the morning and she tried to create the impression that Vienna was thrilling her completely. She said that in the afternoon they were going to a famous pastry shop where even archdukes could be seen sometimes.

As it happened the afternoon brought few new impressions to Elisabeth. The boys were practising at Freudenau and their place was taken by the parents. Later Fritzl and his mother also came in. There were no archdukes, and even if one of them had appeared, Elisabeth would not have overcome the feeling that the afternoon had been spent in a rather aimless fashion. Papa seemed to feel the same, and while discussing with Herr von Strada the elevation of the Prince von Wied to the throne of Albania, his eyes wandered towards Elisabeth and they realized that they understood one another silently. Mama was trying hard to picture for the benefit of Fritzl's mother the advantages and the drawbacks of a rural existence. Angélique was the only one who seemed to enjoy herself thoroughly: she looked round with silent satisfaction and left the talking to Fritzl. At last the brothers arrived, and Vera, who had by now given up all hope of meeting her Hungarian, received Rudi as a rescuer from solitude and graciously made room for him by her side. In the absence of the Hungarian she did not mind having him for a neighbour and she was even willing to look at him in a somewhat ironically enticing way. Rudi's eyes shone with happiness. He talked with more confidence than was his wont about the splendid qualities of his horse which had by now entirely recovered from the fatigue of the journey from Czernowitz.

"What do you think of her?" he whispered to Elisabeth, who was seated at his other side. She had been afraid of this question, but happily she was not alone with him, and he was so much in love that he would fail to perceive her reserve. She tried to smile at him: "You want to know, and at once? I think it matters much more to know what you think of her!"

He nodded with a satisfied smile. She had rightly gauged his frame of mind, and her subtle evasion passed unnoticed. His attention had already returned to Vera. Frau von Strada suggested that they should go home early. The dinner hour had been advanced owing to the performance at the Burgtheater. They all changed in a hurry, and Papa wore his uniform for the first time in many years.

Being driven to the entrance, climbing the grand marble staircase amidst the buzz of conversation of so many people, all this was like a dream for Elisabeth and Angélique. They were in the Burgtheater at last, in that place which had become a legend in the whole of Austria, and they were going to see *Twelfth Night* by the famous poet Shakespeare. While Arnim went to the box office to get the reserved seats, Rudi showed them the gilt-framed portraits of famous actors and actresses which adorned the staircase and the foyer. Near the cloakrooms officers in full dress uniforms assisted their ladies to take off their coats and their furs. Lovely and elegant women were standing before the mirrors that reflected and multiplied the light from the innumerable crystal candelabra. Diamonds and diadems flashed all round. Then followed the almost solemn entry into their two boxes. From the humming house opera glasses were directed upon the four girls. The footlights were already throwing their reflection on the red velvet curtain with its heavy golden tassels. They were hardly seated when silence fell, the house sank into darkness and the curtain rose on the sunny splendour of the ducal court of Illyria. The very first words of the melancholy and lovesick prince, seeking in vain the consolation of music as a cure for his passion, carried Elisabeth's thoughts back to Maria-Licht. She realized, of course, that it was foolish and childish to apply all this to herself, but she suddenly felt an intense longing to have von Brandt with her.

Angélique's emotion was more direct: she dared hardly breathe. She did not want to remember her own world at all, because it appeared miserable in comparison with this, in which she tried with all her might to feel at home. Shyly the question arose in her, whether, if she had grown up in different surroundings, in a world where going to the theatre was not an impossibility, she herself would not be different . . . ? It appeared suddenly to her as though only in such a sphere could she have known happiness, and she believed that she had the power to personify someone else, as well, for instance, as that girl on the stage who stood there, without self-consciousness, dressed as a boy. What a dream it must be to wear these splendid costumes, to recite poetry in the magic glow of the footlights. How long ago was it that she recited poetry for herself? She remembered the follies that had preoccupied her then with regret and with a sense of shame. She felt infinitely irritated by that fool of a Fritzl who imagined he was making himself useful by whispering from behind

her the names of the actors and actresses; he achieved nothing except to increase her feelings of bitter envy. As she lay in bed that night the emotion of the evening discharged itself in the shape of confused and exquisite dreams, from which she found it difficult, the next morning, to return to a sense of reality. When Fritzl came to fetch her and Elisabeth for High Mass in the St. Stephen's Cathedral, she treated him so unkindly that anybody else would have turned his back to her.

Maria would have liked to have gone to this Sunday ceremony, but her husband ordered her to stay at home and to keep quiet, because she had tired herself so much the day before. She stayed in bed reading a letter from Frieda which she intended to answer secretly while the others were out of the house. Everything was going well at Maria-Licht. Early in the morning, while Vera was still asleep, Elisabeth wrote to Herr von Brandt. Would he think it strange to receive such a long letter from her? But wasn't he bound to be interested by what she had seen at the theatre the day before, and by the names of all those who had played? After this she would, of course, not write again. But the performance of *The Meistersingers* at the Court Opera on the Monday evening provided her once more with so much material that she felt obliged to give another elaborate description. Suddenly she noticed that Vera was awake, observing her quietly from her bed. She had entirely forgotten that she was not alone in her room and it gave her such a shock that she made a large blot on the envelope. She bent forward with a furious blush to remedy the accident as much as possible with a piece of blotting paper. Vera said nothing. She was ill-tempered throughout the day, and the reason was not difficult to guess.

Elisabeth had gradually given up pretending to herself about her feelings for Herr von Brandt. Of course they were friends, and the daily exchange of views between them had become so much of a habit that it obliged her more or less to keep him informed of what she was experiencing here. But it had gone so far now that all these things had no meaning for her unless she knew that he experienced them with her from a distance. She was unable to forget him for a minute here in Vienna, and she would only feel at peace again when she heard his voice. Had his parting glance not told her a lot about his own feelings, at the station?

She whispered his first name, Paul! She was startled at her own audacity. Would she ever be allowed to call him this? How safe she would feel if it came to that! To think of it almost stopped her breath. Paul . . . Paul! She did not know how this fortnight in Vienna would ever come to an end. On the other hand, she was pleased that there was still time for reflection, so that she might settle her line of conduct for when they met again. Oh, she did not want

to think yet, not now! She would decide how to greet him when they left Vienna, if necessary in the train. Much depended on the reply that would come to her letters.

With their brothers as chaperones the girls went that evening to see a play by Hauptmann at the Kammerspiele. After the play Fritzl tried to persuade them to come and have something in the Ratskeller. Mizzi thought that her parents would not mind very much if they ever came to hear of it, and Vera did not protest either. She only suggested that they should go to a wine cellar in the Piaristengasse, because there was less chance of being recognized by acquaintances there. Her advice was taken, and instead of acquaintances of her parents, Vera found her officer in the midst of a company of Hungarian cavalry officers with their ladies. A Magyar exuberance reigned at his table, but he did not seem inclined to take part. While he talked his eyes wandered continually round. He noticed the girls as soon as they entered and a surprised smile appeared on his mouth. But he controlled himself entirely and made no gesture of recognition. But from his circle a young lieutenant got up and came across to greet Arnim and Rudi. He spoke with a strong Hungarian accent. When Vera realized that she was bound to make the Hungarian's acquaintance, she blushed with pleasure. Arnim introduced the Hungarian lieutenant to her: "Lonyay, a competitor at the races next Saturday, and probably one of the winners," he added with a laugh. The other man immediately returned the compliment, but then he continued: "Anyhow none of us has much chance now that the Cossacks have also decided to take part."

"Cossacks?" a woman shouted from his table.

"And have these Cossacks got to win?" another officer asked contemptuously.

"They won't get every prize, but certainly half of them."

"If you talk like that, Lonyay, you'd better not take part at all!" His Hungarian friend looked round inquisitively during these protestations. Lonyay conducted his friends to his table and added more chairs. The dark tall captain turned out to be Baron Batthyany, the leader of the Hungarian team. Before he bowed over her hand, he looked into Vera's eyes.

Somehow it appeared to happen naturally that they found themselves seated side by side, and while a discussion began around the table, partly in Hungarian and partly in German, about these unaccountable Russians who first refused to participate and then suddenly announced their arrival, Vera and her neighbour became involved in a conversation about Vienna and Budapest. Batthyany sang the praise of Vienna in choice terms, but then she told him that she adored Budapest. He listened with bent head and a smile on his lips. His smile and his silence were more sincere than the words he had

spoken a moment ago. Now that he heard so much in favour of his own town, his Hungarian patriotism awakened and he began to feel a little sorry for any one who was doomed to live in Vienna after having once tasted the delights of Budapest. To Vera it seemed that she was betraying Austria and her own town. Oh, but why should she mind!

Rudi, who was interested in all that was being said about the horse show of the following Saturday, did not at once notice how absorbed Vera was in her conversation with the Hungarian captain. When he noticed it at last, he tried to draw her into the general conversation in a friendly and discreet manner. But it seemed as though he had no hold on her. Thereupon he decided to pretend that he was enjoying himself as much as the others. But he found it none too easy: now and then his eyes went towards Elisabeth as though he wanted her support. Why did she look away from him? He observed the Hungarian captain a little more carefully, and noticed that his face expressed nothing beyond a reserved courtesy.

Elisabeth had been waiting impatiently to know whether Rudi would not at last realize the obvious. Her eyes accidentally met those of Batthyany, and she turned pale. What was there in his glance? What gave him the right to smile that smile of amused irony? Was he aware of the fact that she was silently watching her brother's interests? Or did he imagine that she had another reason for resenting his interest in Vera? She hoped he would not think anything of the sort! When she returned his impertinent look with a glance full of contempt, the expression of his face changed. The smile gave way to slight astonishment. She avoided looking at him again, but she felt that he continued to study her. When they left, shortly after midnight, in order not to be home too late, the Hungarian saluted her with excessive courtesy. She was furious.

Vera did not seem as pleased with her evening as might have been supposed. Or was she only looking so forbidding in order to make it clear to Rudi that she was not going to have a scene? So far he had not shown the slightest trace of jealousy or suspicion: he was as friendly as usual to her.

Mainly in order to tease Fritzl Angélique flirted with the little Hungarian lieutenant Lonyay, who had entered into the game with all the fire and the impetuosity of his race. But he left her as indifferent as Fritzl. After another evening at the theatre she was preoccupied with entirely different thoughts. She had dreams that could never come true, and that made her bitter and unsatisfied. The only use she had for Fritzl and the little Hungarian was that she could vent her resentment upon them.

While undressing, Mizzi confessed that she had fallen in love. Oh, no, not with one of the Hungarians as one might have thought! No!

Had Angélique not noticed the young musician at the little table by the entrance, with his long wavy hair and the interesting eyes beneath the tall Beethoven forehead? That was Walther Bohm! Had she never heard of Walther Bohm! Mizzi had been to one of his recitals, but this was the first time she had seen him from near by. She admired his marvellous hands, everything in him thrilled her, and her voice still trembled with excitement. She had heard him mention to his companion that he was to accompany a French violinist the following Friday. Mizzi was determined to be there, and she had a plan ready for being there. Fritzl would have to take them out, but she could not go alone, and therefore she begged Angélique to come with her. Besides, this would ensure that Fritzl would agree.

Angélique had to laugh at Mizzi's exaltation. "What else would there have been for Friday night?" she asked, afraid to forgo anything that mattered.

"Nothing!" said Mizzi, speaking very fast. "It's on the following day that the boys are riding!"

"Well, then you can count on me."

Mizzi gave a sigh of relief. "But now you mustn't tease Fritzl quite so much," she added, "otherwise he'll leave us in the lurch at the last moment."

"I guarantee Fritzl will be there."

Mizzi threw her arms round Angélique's neck in sheer gratitude. "I say, I'm not your Walther!" shouted Angélique. But the little Viennese blonde only held her more tightly and kissed her wildly. Angélique felt a little awkward at this sudden effusiveness, and vigorously pushed Mizzi away. Mizzi gave a high and somewhat hysterical laugh; there were tears in her eyes.

Elisabeth looked out every day for the post, but Paul von Brandt was apparently too busy to answer. She thought she understood the reason of his reserve: he had come to their house as a teacher, and she was still his pupil. But she was twenty now! And surely he might at least have acknowledged her two long letters on a post card! He need not worry, she would not write again. Moreover she had nothing more to tell him. She had seen enough of Vienna, and she wished they could return to Maria-Licht as soon as possible after the horse show.

On the Friday morning Mama gave her a little letter that had just come for Papa, and Elisabeth was surprised by the friendly and understanding way in which Mama looked at her. Herr von Brandt sent a detailed report about Stephan, to whom he was giving as much attention as he could afford, and he ended with the words: "From Elisabeth's picturesque description of the evening at the Burgtheater and at the Opera I see that the girls are fully enjoying Vienna. They

will find their lessons rather dull after their return. Please give them my greetings."

Elisabeth returned the letter to her mother with as much self-possession as possible. Picturesque description! When she was alone she gave free rein to her disappointment and to her resentment. Then she dried her tears. If he teased her, she would repay him in the same coin. At the ball in the casino, that would conclude the horse show to-morrow night, she was going to dance with all the young foreign officers, and she would send him another "picturesque description."

Rudi and Arnim exercised their horses every day and on this last afternoon the girls went to have a look. Captain Batthyany was not there, but Angélique had the opportunity to admire her young Hungarian lieutenant in a few perfect jumps. When he recognized her among the score or so of spectators he surpassed himself. Bending sideways from his saddle, he whispered to her under her parasol that she was robbing him of his sleep. He begged her for a token he could wear on the following day medieval fashion. Thereupon Angélique pressed her perfumed little handkerchief into his hand. He kissed it and placed it inside his uniform coat above his heart. "But now I expect the Hungarians to win. Please don't forget," she declared.

He was already going to make a promise to her when he suddenly remembered: "But what about your brother? Wouldn't you prefer your brother's team to win?"

She said nothing and looked at him with an air of mystery which made him sigh with excitement. He mattered more to her than her brother! "I should love to see those Russians of whom you are so afraid. Don't they train here?"

The reminder affected him disagreeably, though he tried to laugh about them. "The Russians? They've just come in to have a look at the ground. That's all. You'd think they were at home here! Yesterday evening they painted the casino red, and to-night the vodka is going to stream again. But as soon as they're in the saddle they're dead sober."

Angélique looked up at him with an air of amused pity. Little Lonyay's story about these triumphant, ribald dare-devils, whose appearance at the horse show seemed to paralyse him, filled her with curiosity. Meanwhile she continued to flirt with him even if it were only for the sake of the pleasure it gave her to see Fritzl's venomous looks, which already frightened Mizzi.

She had a grudge against Mizzi: the day after her promise she had found out that there was to be another visit to the theatre to-night. It had not been easy for them to get permission to go to the concert hall, though nobody could understand why Angélique preferred to go to a recital by a French violinist who was still unknown in Vienna.

Arrangements had already been made for her to go with Vera, Elisabeth, Rudi and Arnim to the Fledermaus, where the famous Fritz Massary was going to appear. Arnim had his suspicions and questioned Fritzl, who could tell nothing except that Angélique had ordered him to escort them there. When he argued that he was not musical, she said he had her permission to sleep throughout the concert.

Still annoyed at the way he had been treated in the afternoon he sat between the two girls in the half-empty room of the small concert hall, and listened sleepily and with a sceptical air to the first bars of the Beethoven sonata which the French violinist was playing as a gesture of courtesy towards his Viennese public. The rest of the programme was devoted to French and Italian classics. Their seats were right in front and Mizzi had every opportunity to watch her pianist. He looked just as a young promising player should look. His hands had a strong and nervous touch and, after the first measures, he became red with excitement. If Angélique had been in the right frame of mind she might have smiled at the expression on Mizzi's face. Mizzi made herself believe that she understood every note and was entirely carried away by the music. But at the same time she wanted everybody to realize this. She was infinitely proud of her pianist, and sat there as though he belonged to her alone and played only for her. As for the violinist, he gave the impression of lacking strength, of being tired and almost in pain. His evening clothes looked a little frayed. While he waited for his cue, his violin under his chin, he looked dejectedly and absent-mindedly at all the unoccupied rows in the hall. As it happened, however, it was not these empty rows, but the playing of his accompanist that displeased him. It took some time before his nervous and more delicate performance succeeded somewhat in toning down the wild brio of the pianist. The sensitive Viennese audience in the hall had already noted which of the two performers was the better musician and it followed the struggle, which was bound to lead to the violinist's victory, with growing interest. In the second movement the pianist had already given up the attempt to shine by himself: he acknowledged the superiority of the Frenchman. In the andante his own playing became more concentrated and restrained, and after an exquisite cantabile, the last bars came with a fine unity of inspiration.

Angélique knew this andante because she had more than once tried to play it herself. Now she felt that even the attempt was a temerity. With the rest of the audience she was under the spell of this foreigner who, at first sight, appeared so little attractive. She felt the dynamic quality of this physically weak man, who poured out his passion with infinite tenderness, after a wild plunge into grief that had left his hearers breathless. She had never heard the andante played in such

a way. The music brought up all kinds of things that were buried in the past, but which she had never succeeded in defeating, although she had forgotten about them for many years. Her dead brother Stephan appeared before her, Stephan whose face assumed that same expression of almost physical pain when he played. She did not know herself whether this music was making her happy, or whether she was experiencing the profoundest sorrow of her life. She suffered under the power the music was exercising over her. She did not easily cry: such things she left to Elisabeth and to others, but now she bent her head and fought with clenched teeth against the great weakness that came over her, against this distressing feeling of happiness that was so closely akin to the deepest despair. This is how Stephan would have played if he were alive, she thought. The music was no longer connected with the concert platform; it had as its inspiration that mysterious wound which the death of her twin brother had inflicted upon her ever so long ago. It passed through her and she herself was the instrument that trembled while it was being played.

During the brief interval between the sonata and a suite for violin and piano by Couperin, she tried to emerge from her trance, but the playing of this foreigner whom chance had placed in her road continued to keep her spellbound. She still heard the allegro of Beethoven's finale, that had grown like a thunder-storm and was now being discharged in the form of frenzied applause all around her. By their enthusiasm the public were trying to make up for those who had stayed away.

Mizzi whispered that the French violinist grudged the success of his accompanist, and wanted all the applause for himself. She nodded. During the main interval Mizzi excitedly seized her arm. "Come along, we're going to get his autograph!" When Angélique resisted, she said with amazement: "What's the matter with you? Are you afraid?"

"We're making ourselves ridiculous," said Angélique. Fritzl, who rose with a sigh, declared that he was absolutely in agreement with Angélique.

"Ridiculous! Why? If everybody else does it! Look for yourself. What *is* ridiculous is to be afraid! I dare say you are not used to that kind of thing in the provinces!" In her eagerness Mizzi lost all sense of proportion. Her miserable eyes tried to convey to Angélique that getting the signature was, after all, a mere pretext.

Angélique hesitated. "Come along!" Mizzi implored her. To Fritzl she added: "You needn't come at all. Wait here for us!" She dragged Angélique along.

In the artists' drawing-room there was a crush of young girls, holding programmes or leather-bound albums, and begging the violinist for an autograph. Mizzi had no difficulty in making her way

to her idol, who stood by himself in a corner and looked at a little card attached to a bouquet of red roses which someone had sent up to him.

Angélique allowed Mizzi to go her own way. This gave her an opportunity for studying the face of the violinist. It had an air of childlike satisfaction and vanity. Was it owing to his playing a moment ago that she felt as though she had known him for years? Her shyness disappeared and she decided that when the crush round him had diminished she would go and say a few words to him. She could hear how he was trying to express himself in his very halting German, and she felt glad that she had learned French so thoroughly when she was a child. When he looked round, a little impatient and bored, his eyes rested on her, and she took her courage in both hands and walked towards him in order to thank him for his performance. His face brightened as soon as he heard his own language. While a few of his admirers hastily withdrew, he expressed his pleasure and his surprise. But he added: "No, you are not French after all."

His voice sounded so melancholy that she asked: "Have you been away from France a long time?"

He made a sad gesture as he signed her programme. "Don't let's talk about that. I travel . . . I travel. . . . If I had that kind of talent I'd speak all the languages of the world, by now—Russian, Finnish, and Patagonian, if there is such a language. The only thing that's French in me is the name on the inside of my collars. Le Franc, Boulevard des Capucins. And also my old French violin. It travels everywhere with me, I'm glad to say."

Angélique wondered whether he told this to every one of the women and girls whose hearts he had put in a flutter. But how could she have expected to mean more to him than did the others, in the same way as he meant more to her? She threw a shy glance at the violin which was his love and which was lying close to him on the baby grand in the drawing-room. No woman would probably ever mean as much to him as his violin.

He handed back her programme. Others were waiting for his autograph, and straining to hear what they were saying. Though he did not seem to relish this crowd of unsatisfied femininity himself, she felt she ought to make room. But as he thanked her and shook hands with her, she suddenly made the involuntary confession: "I had a young brother, and your playing has reminded me of him. . . ."

Perhaps he did not even understand what she said, but there was merely a strange vibration in her voice that struck his musical ear. He looked at her with hesitation. She was so moved that she would have liked to run out of the room at once. Why had she been unable to keep this thought to herself? It was no concern of his! She felt ashamed because so many others must have heard her. Happily Mizzi

was moving towards her and asked whether they should go, but Desmond, the violinist, said to her: "What are you doing after the concert? Are you going home at once?"

She looked at him with surprise. But Mizzi answered in her unself-conscious schoolgirl French and with an admirable presence of mind: "No, we are going to have a drink somewhere. Shall we wait for you?"

"Oh, yes, do!"

"All right, till later, then."

Mizzi pinched Angélique in the arm while she drew her out. "He is coming too!" she whispered with a kind of hysterical joy. "Walther is also coming! Oh, and something dreadful has happened! He thinks that those roses have come from me. Well, as a matter of fact, they are from me, but he is not to know!" Suddenly she looked at Angélique with undisguised admiration. "I say . . . However did you manage it all so quickly with your violinist?"

Fritzl heard with some terror about the appointment that had been made by the girls. He said that he would be made responsible for this folly though it was entirely due to Mizzi. He had a worried look throughout the second part of the concert, and he kept reproaching himself for his weakness. Why had he allowed himself to be persuaded to come at all? As for Angélique, she was not even looking at him. Everything that had happened and that was still to happen seemed unbelievable to her. She kept looking at Desmond in order to preserve every one of his features in her memory, in case this might be her last meeting with him. She felt almost frightened at the thought that she was going to speak to him, and when at the end of the concert Fritzl helped her with her cloak, she shuddered slightly.

After he had shaken off a few late admirers, Desmond came running towards them. He carried his own violin case and was dressed in a fur coat as a protection against this chilly spring evening. Angélique introduced Mizzi and Fritzl to him but he seemed hardly to notice them. "And where are we going now?" he asked in a voice that was still excited by the performance, and which revealed something of the dependence of a child that is used to leaving the decision to other people. Walther Bohm, who had joined them, suggested a restaurant but Fritzl, entirely sure of his ground now that it was a matter of deciding which place to go to, declared that the Augustiner-Keller was obviously the most attractive place to take a foreign visitor. His advice was followed, and what he took care not to mention was that he hoped to find Arnim and the others there. At the artists' entrance a carriage was waiting for the soloist. Fritzl had a cab waiting at the other side of the hall. Desmond did not leave him time to arrange the distribution of seats. He said to Angélique: "You are driving with me, aren't you?" She obeyed him without

question and stepped inside. Fritzl looked on with amazement, but did not find the courage to interfere. To Mizzi's distress he stayed behind with her and her pianist.

Angélique was prepared for any eventuality as the carriage drove away. She knew nothing of this man, whose actions seemed entirely unpredictable. She felt that he might suddenly take her in his arms and kiss her. Maybe he was used to such adventures after a concert. She knew that she would not resist. But she breathed with relief when she found that he had no intention of capturing such a cheap victory. With his violin case carefully poised on his knees, he asked how she had enjoyed the Corelli sonata with its splendid prelude. "I thought of you as I played it," he said. She did not know what to reply. She could not even tell him that she had realized it, because she had only looked at him without listening to his music. "When are you leaving Vienna?" she said, breathing with difficulty in her excitement.

"To-morrow," he replied. "I've got to play in Venice. I have only to-night to talk to you. I am sorry you have friends with you." She felt sorry too, but what else could he expect? Of course he lived entirely outside the bourgeois world and its conventions. He took hold of her hand and looked at her. "I don't know why, but I feel I want to talk to you, to talk at great length, throughout the night. It's not because I want to speak my own language. When you came to me during the interval I felt that you didn't want simply to get my signature on your programme. I read something in your eyes. And as you left I suddenly knew that I could not part from you like this. Now I am alone with you here, and I've got to think of our being parted instead of enjoying our being together. It seems to be the law of my life. I am always going away. Tell me your name, at any rate."

She mentioned her name; he repeated it. "Angélique . . . I'm lucky at any rate to have met a girl with a French name in this foreign country! A dear old aunt of mine is called Angélique. I'll write to her that I've met you. Well, now you are no longer quite a stranger. How old are you? Or rather, how young are you? Twenty, perhaps? Then I am just twice as old as you are." He allowed these words to escape from him, and his voice sounded sad. Did he mean what he said? And did he not feel that his age did not matter in the least, that she was entirely in his power?

"Aren't you ever coming back to Vienna?" she asked with sudden despair.

"Perhaps. It depends on what the papers will say about me to-morrow. I should like to appear at the Philharmonic one day. I'd be able to play much better without that Orlando Furioso at the piano. During rehearsals I told him what I wanted, but when we were in

the concert room he went about it as though I hadn't said a thing. I was hardly able to hear myself play. I was able to tame the wild animal just a little, but there was no collaboration. May I hope to see you again if ever I play here?"

"I shall try," said Angélique. "But I don't live in Vienna."

"What! You don't live in Vienna! Where do you live?"

The carriage stopped. Angélique had just the time to produce a visiting card from her bag and to press it into his hand. "Write to me if you come to Vienna again," she begged.

"I shall write most certainly. And soon," he promised. Then the driver opened the door of the cab. Angélique stepped out, blushing deeply. The others arrived almost simultaneously. Fritzl was offended and pretended not to see her.

They were hardly seated when Arnim and his company entered. Apart from Fritzl, they were all very surprised at the meeting. Desmond was distressed and tried to sit a little apart with Angélique. But in the presence of her brother and her sister she felt ill at ease. She seemed no longer to hear what he told her. Everything was over already, although they were still together. The end had come sooner than she had expected. His face again assumed that slightly pained expression it wore at the beginning of the concert. He emptied two or three glasses of wine in silence. Behind him a little string orchestra was playing and he looked at the violinist, who alternated sad and merry tunes according to the genuine gipsy recipe.

Angélique felt a growing resentment against all these people who were seated at the table with them and who spoiled her first meeting with this friend. All chance had gone now of being taken home by him in his carriage, as she had hoped before they arrived. When his glance wandered to Vera, probably quite absent-mindedly, she felt a sudden pang. If she wanted to be jealous, she thought, there would be chances enough with him. In every town girls would queue up in the artists' reception room.

She felt almost grateful to Rudi when he gave the signal to go home. On taking leave from him she tried to make Desmond feel by the pressure of her hand what she would have liked to tell him had there been an opportunity. This evening had brought her the revelation of her life and she would always continue to think of him. For a second his eyes seemed to show that he understood, and he kept her hand so tight that she had to wrench it loose. Through the carriage window she saw him standing with his violin case under his arm. He slowly lifted his hat. She expected that in the carriage Elisabeth would perhaps make a remark about her curious behaviour and about the lack of courtesy of the musician during the introductions. She was prepared to defend herself so sharply that they would

all be frightened. But all her sister did was to ask after a few minutes: "Was the concert good?"

It was difficult for Angélique to get angry at this innocent question. And yet even these words irritated her. It seemed as though it would be an insult to Desmond if she were to say that this concert had been the loveliest music she had ever heard. Elisabeth would no doubt reflect that it was after all the first concert to which she had ever been. She preferred, therefore, to give a detached and cool reply: "You'll read about it to-morrow in the papers." Elisabeth put no further question and looked out of the carriage.

Angélique dreamed the whole night of this music. Her impression grew feverishly confused; she heard Desmond's voice, and each word he had spoken acquired a deeper significance. She knew that this evening happiness had passed by her and left her in despair. But why had she allowed it to escape? Why did she not tell him what she felt? What if she had told him? Would he have taken her away with him? His violin travelled with him. . . . She dreamt that he bent his face over her as he did over his beloved instrument. She surrendered to him as his violin surrendered. She sang beneath his kiss and she cried with ecstasy. The following morning she woke up in a grey, chill world without hope.

Mizzi bought a few morning papers and was pale with indignation because all the musical critics praised the Frenchman. They hoped to see him again soon on a Viennese platform, but with a more suitable accompanist. Angélique collected the critiques which Mizzi had thrown away, and cut them out in order to keep them together with the programme and his autograph. A little hope revived in her. After such tempestuous praise he was bound to come back to Vienna. And then she must come here at any cost. Nothing would hold her back, not even an open breach with her father.

The morning passed like a dream. Only the excitement of Rudi and Arnim reminded her of the horse show and the competition of the afternoon. As she dressed, she vaguely fancied that in the midst of thousands of visitors she would suddenly recognize Desmond, unable to drag himself away from Vienna.

The little Hungarian lieutenant Lonyay endeavoured in vain to draw her attention. Her eyes wandered searchingly across the crowd, enveloped in dust and in sunlight, which followed the competition with excited cries. Applause burst out when an Austrian team looked like being victorious. But the Russians proved to be favourites. The admiration of the spectators for these dare-devil riders with their tall white caps at the back of their heads, with their Don Juan moustaches and their triumphant glances, was stronger than their national feeling. Only a few Hungarians and Austrians were able to hold their own against such born horsemen. Followed by Vera's burning eyes,

Captain Batthyany rode magnificently. Rudi was given a mark of distinction for a few impeccable jumps, but Arnim, who had already collected a fine number of points, was unlucky enough to fall with his horse. His usual Viennese light-heartedness abandoned him when the veterinary surgeon declared that the animal's leg was broken and that it would have to be shot. The cavalry code prescribed that Arnim should do it himself and this upset him thoroughly. He could not be persuaded to take another mount in order to compete in the other events. Rudi, who knew how fond he was of his Trilby, took him by the arm. Big tears shone in Arnim's eyes. "It's all the fault of those damned Russians," he muttered. "They compel one to ask the impossible from one's horse. If ever there's a war . . ." "Hush," said Rudi warningly, but Arnim was unable to restrain himself: "If there's a war I'll make them pay!"

After the distribution of prizes everybody hurried home for dinner and to change for the ball that would be held at the casino. In the midst of all the private carriages, dog-carts, cabs and motor cars, slowly moving townward along the Prater Hauptallee, their carriage seemed hardly to move.

That evening the Russian officers booked yet another success. At the ball they performed a Cossack dance which they had obviously and carefully prepared in order to capture the heart of every woman who witnessed it. It was a medley of wild cries, gestures, and flying caps. The military band played the national dances of each team and Lonyay was looking round in despair for a girl who could dance the czardas with him. The buffet was extensively patronized, and the Russians celebrated their victory with champagne. Moreover they were hot and thirsty from their strenuous dancing. A few of the older officers kept somewhat aside in order to watch events.

Arnim and Rudi had succeeded in reserving a small table near the dancing floor and no sooner were they seated there in company with the girls than the Hungarian team leader appeared. Elisabeth was sure that he came for Vera, but to her distress he made a profound bow before her. "Thank you, for the time being I don't want to dance," she said.

He received her blunt refusal in silence and made a bow before Vera. But Vera was obviously offended by not having been asked first, and for one moment she hesitated whether to accept. Then she rose and put her hand over his arm. No doubt she had quickly reasoned out the situation: the Hungarian had merely wanted to have a first dance with Elisabeth in order not to make his courtship too obvious. Elisabeth's eyes followed them in the throng. The Hungarian captain was so tall that she never lost sight of him: Vera seemed to disappear in his arms. And where was Rudi now? Apparently he had asked Mizzi to dance after the Hungarian carried

Vera away. Suddenly she saw him, and he tried to smile at her. Lieutenant Lonyay fetched away Angélique and Arnim alone remained to keep her company. He tried to talk, to distract her attention from certain things which apparently even he thought disagreeable, but all she could hear was the waltz that hammered on her nerves. She had a dark foreboding that the evening would end unhappily. The whole day seemed to be ill-fated. In the afternoon Arnim had been compelled to shoot his favourite horse, and he had been persuaded only with much difficulty to come to the ball. She would have loved to pour out her heart to him and to ask what he thought of his sister Vera. But she was his sister, after all, and it was as much out of tact as from pride that Elisabeth preferred to keep silent.

At the next dance Rudi stood up at once in order to invite Vera. Did he want to establish his rights towards the Hungarian? Elisabeth ardently hoped he would. Vera rose at once and followed him, and the almost naïve expression of satisfaction on his face showed how upset he must have been by the previous dance. Oh, why did he always betray his feelings so clearly?

While Elisabeth still felt angry, she was startled to notice that one of the young Cossacks was leaving the buffet and advancing towards her. His face was flushed with drink, and his eyes were fixed upon her. He walked unsteadily. In a wave of panic she looked up to Arnim, who had just risen to invite a girl he knew to dance. But before Arnim had understood her mute appeal and was able to return, Batthyany rose unexpectedly and looked at her with an enquiring smile. She allowed herself to be led away, but she saw an ugly expression in the eyes of the Russian, who was thus stopped in the middle of his course. So she had after all to dance with the Hungarian. She had noticed during his previous dance what a perfect partner he was, but now it was he who hastened to pay her a compliment. "So this is how perfectly the girls in Vienna dance," he said. His voice was deep and quiet. His Hungarian accent was hardly perceptible. Elisabeth did not think it necessary to tell him that she was not from Vienna. She could not bring herself to talk to this man, and he would have to be satisfied with the circumstances which enabled him to have a dance with her. But suddenly she saw the look in Vera's dark eyes from over Rudi's shoulder. She noticed the pair among a crowd of people who were whirling around her, and this unexpectedly decided Elisabeth to converse after all.

"You rode splendidly this afternoon," she said.

"Had I realized that you noticed me, I might perhaps have tried my best," he replied with a laugh. Then he added: "Wasn't that young Austrian lieutenant of the Uhlans who jumped so well your brother?" The question implied something of personal contact, and it struck her disagreeably. She would have liked to leave Rudi entirely

outside the conversation. "A few nights ago you were introduced to one another," she reminded him.

His eyes looked at her with a challenge; he seemed amused because she was so ready with her replies. "My thoughts must have been elsewhere that evening," he said. "I failed to recognize him, until I was struck by his resemblance to you." It was no good. She turned away her face with an expression of annoyance.

The uncontrolled hostility of Vera's reception afterwards was sufficient compensation for having to dance with Batthyany. If he asked her again she would certainly accept. She felt almost sorry that he kept away for some time. The Russian continued to peer at her from the distance, and in order not to be exposed to his attentions she danced alternately with Arnim, with her brother, and with a good-natured Czech lieutenant who began to tell her the story of his life during the dance. Unexpectedly she saw Vera dancing once more with Batthyany. It was as though he were dividing his attentions between the two of them with the strictest impartiality. He asked her once more for the next dance.

"Your friend tells me that you are not Viennese at all," he said. "Why didn't you protest when I joined you with the Viennese girls in paying you a compliment? Apparently my compliments are not worth your notice."

So he has been questioning Vera about me, thought Elisabeth. Probably Vera had not liked it, but this Elisabeth did not mind. The more she could tease Vera, the better she felt. She wished she could make her so jealous that there would be a public outburst which would open Rudi's eyes. Then he would at any rate know the truth and be able to draw his own conclusions. At the same time Elisabeth would have liked to have yet another spectator, apart from Vera, for her dance with the Hungarian. Oh, if somebody who was working hard at his thesis at Maria-Licht and who did not even find the time to write her a note could have been present! This Hungarian cavalry captain really danced marvellously. Fancy his having studied her features so carefully that he saw she was Rudi's sister. What was he asking now? Whether she did think his compliments worth while? But of course she did! Any compliment from him was worth while, and she would have liked to write it down in order to show it to Vera first of all and to send it home afterwards.

Suddenly there was a fracas. The half-drunk young Russian who wanted to dance with her some time ago crashed into a couple of dancers and tried to pick a quarrel with them. One could see his face puffed out with anger, and his blazing eyes. The confusion was increased by the fact that the band broke off in the midst of a dance. Elisabeth turned pale when she noticed that the couple who got into difficulties with the Russian were little Lonyay and her sister

Angélique. The Russian addressed a few angry words in his own language to Lonyay and moved towards him. But at the same moment somebody placed himself between them: it was Rudi, who felt obliged to take the part of his sister's cavalier. Elisabeth shrieked. Batthyany, seeing that one of the officers under his care was in a difficulty, left her and made his way through the throng of dancers. Just as the Russian raised his hand to deliver a blow at the new supporter of the little Hungarian lieutenant, a stronger hand gripped his wrist. Turning with a cry of anger, he saw before him the athletic leader of the Hungarian team. And before the incident could take a worse turn, the leader of the Russians was by Captain Batthyany's side and addressed a few gruff words to the drunkard, who seemed at once to sober down. He did not venture to move and threw a glance loaded with hatred at the Hungarian giant, who had meanwhile relinquished his grip. Batthyany turned towards his own lieutenant and ordered him in Hungarian to retire at once and to consider himself under arrest. Deadly pale, Lonyay accepted the undeserved humiliation. He looked at no one, not even at Angélique, and made his way with quick steps through the crowd of soldiers, who fell back before him. A friend of his accompanied him to the cloak-room where he had to get his cloak.

The leader of the Russians, a major, had meanwhile got the story of the incident. Thereupon he turned towards Batthyany and asked in halting German whether he wanted satisfaction for his offended subordinate. Batthyany answered with quiet courtesy that duelling was not authorized in the Austro-Hungarian army. He added that it was not their habit to attach undue importance to a word which escaped a man in the excitement of dancing and drink, especially when this word was pronounced by a young officer belonging to a friendly nation and who was here as a guest. The Russian officer inclined his head as a sign of thanks. A faint expression of mockery appeared in his narrow Tartar eyes. But Batthyany pretended not to notice it and turned to Rudi. In a tone of quiet conversation he said to him: "I believe that you get out of this best of all."

Elisabeth heaved a deep sigh of relief and noticed how pale Rudi had turned. His career as an officer had been in the balance. If the Russian had had the time to hit him, Rudi would have been obliged to resign his commission because of the permanent dishonour this would have entailed.

"Thank you," said Rudi, addressing the Hungarian with strange rigidity.

Batthyany smiled and returned to Elisabeth. One of the senior officers present ordered the band to play and a few couples were beginning to dance in a rather self-conscious fashion. It was hoped thus to quieten the hostile restlessness of the Russians, who were

standing together in a corner talking in an excited undertone. Elisabeth did not want to dance any more; she wanted to go home at once. Mizzi also was frightened. Angélique seemed completely indifferent to anything that happened. But Vera protested feverishly against the idea of leaving. The incident was over, she argued. Rudi and Arnim had to stay in any case. Arnim was still resentful because he had not been there in time to stand by his friend when the half-drunk Russian lifted his hand against him. He had been held back by force when he wanted to rush into the fray, but he still hoped that something would happen, and therefore he clung to Rudi like a shadow. Rudi tried to make it clear to Elisabeth that he could not possibly leave. He had to stay in case one of the Russians wanted to speak to him. "But you were not concerned with the whole incident!" she exclaimed nervously. He hardly listened to her. His eyes sought the Hungarian captain. "As long as he stays, I stay too," he said. At any rate she knew his real motive.

There was no doubt that by now the resentment of the Russians had turned against the Hungarian leader who had had the temerity to take one of them by the wrist as though he were a little boy. Noticing that something had to be done, Batthyany unexpectedly walked towards the Russians and surprised their major by addressing him in fluent Russian. The major reflected for a moment and nodded assent. A few moments later the Russian team left the room, followed after a brief interval by the Hungarian team. Batthyany came to take leave from the girls. "As you see, we pronounced a Solomon's judgment upon ourselves," he said. "But I am distressed that I shan't be able to dance any more to-night. Still, the ball can now continue undisturbed and I hope you will enjoy yourselves." His eyes slowly passed from Vera to Elisabeth and from her to Rudi. His eyes showed something like a Puckish understanding. Thereupon he walked away. "A pity," said Arnim, who was sorry that everything had terminated peaceably.

It would have been possible now to stay on without fear of unpleasantness. But this time it was Vera herself who, with angry disappointment in her voice, suggested that they should go home. Rudi was at liberty to draw whatever conclusion he liked from her frankness. He said nothing and looked away. Elisabeth saw how, underneath his mask of unconcern, he was struggling with disappointment. She would have liked to take him in her arms like a mother. Arnim also seemed to understand what was happening, and cast an angry look at his sister, who completely ignored it.

Full of the bitterest enmity towards one another, Elisabeth and Vera undressed together in their room. They avoided saying the slightest word which might have had fatal consequences. But both of them knew perfectly well what the other thought of her.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE DANCE IN THE MEADOW

THE following morning Georg heard of the danger in which Rudi had been. His hand trembled. He had been unhappy about the Russians' success on the previous afternoon, he knew their Slavonic pride and also the brutality of their behaviour when they were in their cups. He was not alone in his ardent wish to reach the end of the Viennese trip. Elisabeth could hardly bear to be alone with Vera: it was becoming a torture to her. It was so clear that Vera's thoughts were night and day with the Hungarian captain, and her indifference to Rudi was such that one wondered how he tolerated it.

Angélique thought of one thing only: would she find a letter from Desmond when she came home. She began to wonder whether the events of that evening had really taken place. The music and the dim memories of her twin brother had played havoc with her judgment. Desmond must have looked into thousands of eyes as he looked into hers, and each woman in turn imagined that she was the chosen one. Each of them had waited for a letter and waited in vain. If this were to be her fate, and if she did not hear from him, Angélique knew that she would never again believe a man. She would never care for another man and she would be right in despising them all, and in playing with them as she had once played with the apothecary's son. She knew how she would organize her life, she would take as her share the luxury of the big town that was Vera's and Mizzi's. And if he came to Vienna for another performance, she would sit in the front row and look at him with a distant smile, throughout the evening, so that he would play badly. It gave her a bitter satisfaction to imagine all the details of her revenge. She realized that she was being ridiculous but she did not mind. But if there were a letter from him on her return? Then she was lost, and she did not know herself what would happen to her. A power stronger than herself would hold her and drive her towards him and towards happiness. She could not quite understand how it was possible for her to stay here with Papa and Mama and with Elisabeth calmly waiting till they all went home. Why did she not get some money from Fritzl or from someone else and simply travel back to Maria-Licht?

On Friday the two boys had to return to their garrison and that day had also been fixed for the departure of the other visitors. On the last evening Elisabeth sought an opportunity to have a private talk

with Rudi. "When shall we meet again, little brother? Are you going to have your leave cancelled as you did last time?"

He was struck by the clumsiness of her reproach and looked at her with slow enquiring eyes. Her last words brought a smile on his face: "Perhaps this time it will depend on you whether we meet again soon," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, supposing you got engaged?" She felt emotion surging through her. She tried to resist and to remain indifferent: "Engaged? Have you by any chance got someone for me?"

"Vera asked who was this Herr von Brandt to whom you were writing early this morning," he said in a teasing voice.

"Oh, is that what makes you ask?"

"No. Last time I was home I saw that you were fond of him." She looked straight ahead, very pale, and he came nearer to her. "And he is fond of you too, my dear. At that time you didn't know it yet yourself, but he did. All that time at Czernowitz I have been wondering how long it would take that slow German to gather up his courage and come into the open."

She turned towards her brother and put her arms round him. "Rudi, what a darling you are." She held her head against him and struggled with her tears. At last she tried to master herself.

"Now you know it all, Rudi, what do you think Papa will say, if Papa . . .?"

"I have an idea he'll be a little startled at first," said Rudi with a grin. "But he'd be startled in any case, whoever it was you produced."

How consoling Rudi's words were! He took in every aspect of the situation in that quietly humorous way of his. He stifled every doubt about von Brandt's sentiments with few words. How she would have loved to continue talking and pour out her heart to him. But it came back to her in a flash that these few moments by themselves had still to be used for something else.

"Rudi . . . How are things between you and Vera?"

Perhaps he had foreseen this turn in the conversation. His expression changed, his face grew tense but outwardly he remained calm. "What do you mean? Things are just as they used to be."

She felt angry and at the same time resigned. Her lips trembled. She controlled herself with difficulty.

"And Vera, does she feel as you do?"

He nodded. "Anyhow she'll feel as I do pretty soon. That fellow has gone and she'll soon forget him if she doesn't meet him any more. I saw how he danced with you. He'll find plenty more in Budapest."

In one sense at any rate Elisabeth felt relieved. Her brother was not entirely blind. She began to see that he loved Vera, defects and

all. Perhaps it was jealousy and a sense of impotence that made her ask :

"And, Rudi, do you think this a good beginning?"

"No," he said quietly but with almost the beginning of a smile, "but perhaps the end will be better."

There was nothing she could do for him, and in a way Elisabeth's old admiration for him was increased by this discovery. He was magnanimous, but he was also strong. Victory would be his in the end. But it was sad to think how much he would have to fight for his victory.

As the train began to move the following morning her only thought was for her brother. She waved to him: "Good-bye, Rudi." As long as they could see one another his smiling, loving eyes looked straight into hers.

At Seekirchen Stephan, Aunt Frieda and Paul von Brandt were on the platform. Elisabeth reflected with satisfaction that he had not been able to escape this duty. He naturally first greeted Papa, and waited politely until Mama had finished embracing Stephan; only then was it the turn of Elisabeth. He was unable to look her straight in the eyes, and there was good reason for this, she thought. As she smiled at him rather challengingly, she noticed with concern that he looked worse, if possible, than at the time of their departure a fortnight ago.

It moved her strangely to feel the pressure of his hand. Was he going once more to treat her like a little child? At present at any rate he did not seem inclined to adopt his defensive tactics. He seemed to have lost a little of his quiet self-possession. Sometimes his eyes wandered away with an expression of feverish fatigue. He had been overdoing things these last few weeks. Within a moment she felt that his silence was forgiven. Her only preoccupation was to prevent him ruining his health for good. She felt sorry that the former easy companionship between them had been lost. She tried to make everything seem as ordinary as possible, and she refrained from reminding him of the glance with which he parted from her when she journeyed away to Vienna. What else could she have done? She saw that his work came before anything else.

While she got out her Greek and Latin books, she realized that in course of the two weeks spent in Vienna she had entirely grown out of the idea that she was merely his pupil. Nevertheless she did her best, even if it were only to make his lessons as easy as possible for him; but she noticed with sorrow and even with anger that Angélique as well as Stephan were making things as difficult as possible. Stephan was suffering from that feeling of having had enough of it that usually comes before the summer vacation. As for Angélique, since her

return from Vienna she appeared to be feeling an utter listlessness. And von Brandt seemed to find it difficult to control himself in dealing with her. She looked at him with a cool smile and did not even seem to hear what he said.

In the end Elisabeth felt she had to discuss the matter with her mother. She suggested that Herr von Brandt might be let off these lessons at once. In a month he would have to go to Munich to present his dissertation on Greek architecture in Italy, and after the summer vacation it would in any case be necessary to make entirely different arrangements for Stephan. Maria looked at her elder daughter and promised to discuss the matter with Papa. The following morning, when Elisabeth was working at a piece of translation in the library about half an hour before the beginning of the classes, von Brandt walked in unexpectedly. She looked up with somewhat mixed feelings and he took a seat at the other side of the table: "What is this I hear: do you people want the vacation to begin even earlier? Has the sacred fire burnt out in you already?"

"Is that the way Papa and Mama have talked to you?"

"No, your mother tried to put it as though you were still aglow with zeal, but wanted me to begin my vacation earlier."

Elisabeth's pride was wounded. Why did he adopt this tone? Why this derisive "you people," and not just "you," as though he did not realize that she alone had taken this initiative.

"You can just think what you like," she said, talking with some difficulty and she took up her pen angrily to go on with her work. But in her excitement she suddenly forgot herself: "Just have a look at yourself in the glass. You'll see yourself that you won't be able to hold out like this. You won't go to Munich at all, because you'll be ill in bed."

She felt sorry almost while she spoke, and bowed her head. She was unable therefore to see the strangely wondering glance he gave her. His long silence increased her oppressive uncertainty. At last he said. "All right. Let's agree that I've come here to thank you for your kind intention. But I can't accept this offer of an earlier vacation."

She shrugged her shoulders nervously. It was though he had intended to say something else, but had changed his mind at the last moment. Now he was slowly getting up. . . . Was he leaving the room? No—he walked round the table and put his hand on the back of her chair. She could feel his hesitation. He wanted to walk out of the room, but he was drawn towards her against his will. She looked up and saw those large dark eyes in his thin face and they betrayed everything as they had done when he took leave from her at the station. "Elisabeth," he said gently as though in a last appeal to her to be more sensible than he was. But how could she be? She

rose tremblingly, her eyes helplessly on his, and suddenly she felt that she was sinking in his arms, crying with joy because of the kisses with which he covered her face.

He let go and tried hard to control himself. "Hush," he whispered hoarsely. "Angélique might walk in. I did not want this. . . . Forgive me. I wanted at least to wait till I had passed my examination. I would have been in a different position towards your parents, then. But it has been so difficult since your return from Vienna, and I wondered whether I would have the strength to hold out. I suddenly felt unable to wait any longer."

She could not possibly take in at once all the things he was bringing out with so much difficulty. But what did it matter? He had kissed her. With a thrill she whispered his name, familiar already in her dreams: "Paul. . . . No one need know yet. We shall wait till after your examination. I shall see to it that Angélique doesn't notice. I shall find it easier to hide my feelings now. Last time he was here Rudi knew at once that I love you. I've thought of you day and night while I was in Vienna. And you didn't even answer my letters. How could you? Oh, God, how different it will all be now, how different."

He took hold of her hands. "Do you believe your father will make difficulties?" he asked in a voice that betrayed his anxiety. She was astonished, because she had always seen him so strong, impregnable. His pride had prevented him accepting even the slightest favour in this house, and now his love for her was going to compel him to ask Papa and Mama for the greatest favour of all. For her sake he was going to humble himself.

She hastened to reassure him. She did not know whether Papa might have any objections; all she knew was that she would overcome all obstacles. She would break the news to Papa herself: if an unguarded word escaped from him Paul need not hear it.

Nine o'clock struck. Stephan and Angélique might come in any moment now. "I'll leave you to yourself for a minute," he said.

"Oh, yes, the class," she said. She had forgotten. "So we'll have the class after all. . . ."

Even if she had imagined that she would have more influence over him now she soon found out her mistake. "Yes, the classes will go on," he said, and he tried to walk away. But his eyes were still longingly fixed on her and she could not restrain herself. Again she fell in his arms and they kissed as passionately as if they had been on the point of parting for years.

When she was alone her head was still in a whirl. She tried to force her way back to reality. She walked towards the windows and breathed deeply as she looked across the woods, thinking of the great, exquisite future that was opening before her. She tried also to think of her father, who would miss her most when she went away with

Paul. But their journey to Vienna seemed to have drawn Papa and Mama closer together. Everything seemed to turn out for the best.

She sat down at the table, struggling against the tears that would not stop. It would cost her a superhuman effort to hide her great happiness from the others as long as Paul considered it necessary. She would have liked to have run into the open, into the woods, to be alone in order to say his name, to cry and to laugh at the same time. But she had to control herself. Paul wanted it. When Angélique came in, with her closed and dissatisfied face, she found Elisabeth bending over her copy-book, with the Greek dictionary by her side.

It was indeed no easy undertaking to guard her great secret. She was only a girl, after all, longing again and again for the confirmation of Paul's feelings. If during the lesson he spoke in the same tone to Angélique as to her, she imagined at once that his affection for both must be equal. Her intelligence told her that this was foolish—but her heart bled and she did not feel reassured till she had met him in the passage to exchange a secret pressure of the hand with him. Afterwards she reproached herself and felt afraid lest he notice how petty she was. And she did so want not to disturb his peace of mind, not to interfere with his work.

She felt more certain every day that Mama had guessed her secret. At last she was unable to delay her confession any longer. It gave her infinite relief. Why had she put it off so long? Mama put her arms round her, kissed her, and said that after his examination Paul could go to Papa with a confident heart, because Papa could not possibly have any objection to him. Could any one doubt von Brandt's earnest intentions and his good character? In her gratitude Elisabeth overwhelmed her mother with kisses. She had never imagined she would get so much support from her. But Mama had changed very much, even Stephan noticed it. Once Mama had become her confidante, Elisabeth could not cease discussing Paul with her. All secrets sooner or later also found their way to Aunt Frieda, and Aunt Frieda was as happy about the impending engagement as though it had been her own. Now, when Paul was working in his room, Elisabeth no longer wandered aimlessly through the house. She could go to her mother and her aunt and talk to them. When she was in bed, knowing that Paul was still at his books, she had the greatest difficulty not to get up quietly and tiptoe to his room. It would have been such a fine thing to do. Why need he be alone, when only a few walls separated them? Paul expected to take his doctor's degree in the second half of May. It was nearly the fifteenth now and he might be called to Munich any day. It seemed absurd that he should still be studying so feverishly. But she knew that it was precisely this perseverance that made her so fond of him. And ought she not to be

grateful that he took all this trouble for this final examination which after all meant so much for her also? She rejoiced at every extra day that was granted him. At last news arrived, Paul was summoned before the board of examiners for the twentieth of May. He packed his suitcase and she saw him off all by herself. What did it matter if any one thought it strange? She knew that Paul would come back a doctor, and she wanted to speak to her father this very day. From the box of the carriage Ignaz listened as hard as he could to catch any morsel of the animated conversation below. There was a long silence, and he could have sworn that a kiss was exchanged behind his back.

"Well, do you feel confident?" asked Elisabeth with a little challenge as they parted. Paul smiled. "I shall imagine that you are in the hall among the audience."

On the way home she wondered what would be the best way of putting the facts before her father. She did not want to wait any longer. She walked to the library, and when she stood before him it all went much more easily than she had imagined. She threw her arms round him and poured out her whole heart.

At first Georg remained rigidly seated in his chair. He was too amazed to talk. Then he pushed her aside and looked in her eyes. "Are you fooling me?" he asked at last. She gave no reply. She was startled to see how pale he had gone.

"You overwhelm me. It's so unexpected," he said, and she heard how his voice broke. "I can't say yes or no. I wasn't ready for this, was I? Von Brandt came into this house as a teacher. He should have thought of that. . . ." But when he saw Elisabeth's big eyes that continued to look at him, Georg swallowed his last words. He tried to remain matter-of-fact. "All right, he is no longer your teacher now. But what is he? How does he imagine his life and yours are going to be after this examination? Have you thought of that? Does he imagine that he'll make a position for himself at once?" But Georg himself realized that all these objections would not hold. Of course this German, who worked night and day, would create a position for himself. What was really such a painful and confusing experience was to hear Elisabeth suddenly declare that she loved a man and wanted to marry him. This it was that struck him like a thunderbolt. He felt that he was the victim of deceit; all this had gone on under his eyes without him noticing anything. He tried to discover serious and solid-sounding arguments in order to persuade Elisabeth to give the matter further thought. But he felt himself that they were mere words, words behind which he tried in vain to hide his panic, his terror at the loss of his favourite daughter, his secret and bitter jealousy. And he knew that his words would have no effect. He

knew his child. If she was fond of a man, no miserable, rational consideration, no power on earth, would keep her away from him.

"Anyhow I'll first have to discuss it with your mother," he said, and at the same time he cursed himself for his harshness which, in fact, was less harshness than weakness and disappointment. Elisabeth nodded and walked away silently with her head erect. Why did he not have the courage to call her back as she reached the door and to take her in his arms? He worked off his irritation by cursing the man who was the cause of all this. His intuition had always warned him against this silent intruder, this robber, who had cunningly stolen his Elisabeth and taught her to play a comedy before her father. Who knew how long it had been going on? Perhaps he was unreasonable, but what did it matter: he had to find someone to hate, someone apart from himself. By the time Maria walked into the room he was already in a more philosophical frame of mind. While he vented his resentment and enumerated all his objections he felt that he was only doing it in order to give her a chance to dispose of them. Maria reminded him how enthusiastic he had once been about this young man whom Otto had sent to them, and how he had always thought highly of him. He listened to her passionately maternal arguments without paying much attention to what she was saying. What mattered was that Maria had been returned to him, and this was a great compensation for his loss. Perhaps she was still not strong, but she had lost the tortured and overwrought air which had made him fear for years that one day her mind might be entirely plunged in darkness. She stood by his side once more as a companion, even though the legs that carried her were still weak. Her recovery was by itself almost too exquisite to believe. Slowly his hand sought hers. He was defeated. "I shall call Elisabeth," she said with her gentle smile that remained perennially young.

The following evening a telegram from Munich brought the happy news Elisabeth had confidently expected. Two days later Paul von Brandt returned. On the platform she greeted him with a solemn "Herr Doktor," after which she kissed him and whispered that everything was settled with Papa. The news of his success had already spread through Seekirchen, the station-master and Ignaz shook hands with him, and while he received their congratulations he had the feeling that it was not only his doctor's degree they had in mind.

In the castle loving hands had adorned his room with flowers. Maria and Aunt Frieda laughed and cried as they allowed themselves to be kissed by him for the first time. Georg tried to soothe his bad conscience by giving him a formidable handshake and by pronouncing a cordial speech of congratulation that suddenly arose from his heart. Stephan did not understand very well what was happening. He

thought it such a funny notion that Herr von Brandt was going to marry Elisabeth and he felt sorry that he was not going to keep his future brother-in-law as a teacher: a brother-in-law would not be over-severe, he thought.

Elisabeth had wondered nervously how her younger sister would take the news. She expected cynical mockery, but to her surprise Angélique did everything she could to be agreeable. Since Paul's departure a complete change seemed to have come over her. Something seemed to have altered her whole outlook on life. Was it merely because with Mama's support she had at last achieved her wish of having a room of her own? At table her hands trembled when she took hold of a dish. Papa looked at her with surprise and irritation. Had he not been determined to make to-night's little dinner a somewhat solemn celebration, he would certainly have addressed a cutting remark to his younger daughter. Suddenly the memory of the evening after that concert in Vienna arose in Elisabeth's mind. It was since then that Angélique behaved so strangely. No doubt, in other circumstances, Elisabeth would have given more thought to the matter. But now she was so busy with her own concerns.

She wrote to Rudi asking whether he could get leave in the second half of June, reminding him of what they had discussed together the last evening in Vienna. He replied that he no longer remembered what it was. She would have to tell him again, but as regards the fortnight's leave, it had been granted, and to Arnim also.

Now at last Paul was able to take the vacation he needed so much. Every day he went for a ride through the woods and the fields with his fiancée, and it soon became obvious how much good this was doing him. They had so much to talk about! Paul had strong hopes of an appointment as lecturer in Munich in the coming autumn. If this proved true, they would probably be able to get married the following spring. Elisabeth already pictured how they would organize their modest home where she would wait to welcome him from his work. Meanwhile, she wanted to know everything about his childhood, about his sister, about his mother who was dead and whose photographs were on his writing-table. She understood him sufficiently by now to realize that he could not possibly have remained an officer like Papa and Uncle Otto. She wondered whether, in the depth of her own heart, there was not a certain contempt for the officer caste. He hastened to assure her that as far as he was concerned there was no question of contempt. How could one despise men like Rudi or her father, who were actuated by heroic motives and placed their lives at the service of an ideal. But he admitted that in his opinion a crisis might occur one day in Rudi's life and that he might lose all pleasure in the profession he had chosen. There might be some unexpected and painful incident in his garrison life, or he

might come across a book left by chance at the officers' club. This might shed a sudden light upon the anachronistic character of his profession, and cut away the ground from under his feet. Elisabeth looked pensively in front of her: she remembered the last days before Arnim's duel, when Rudi wrote to her that if Arnim were killed he would not remain very keen on his profession. But now she did not want to go too deeply into these matters. Rudi was still an officer, and she preferred to glide over the profound difference of outlook between her lover and her favourite brother.

She read Paul's dissertation with infinite admiration for the ideas with which it teemed and for the noble form in which he had clothed them. His intelligence filled her with infinite awe. She wanted to see his books and his photographs of those old Greek temples and theatres in Italy that embodied the purest spirit of Hellenic beauty as it had blown across to the Appennine peninsula. She compared them with the pictures that showed how the manly, pugnacious spirit of Rome had transformed the Greek heritage into a hard, matter-of-fact world that had a grandeur of its own. The way Paul explained these things to her made them appear so logical and so simple. She would never have thought that a few monuments, a few mere fragments, would have sufficed to provide an outline of the whole evolution of mankind, that they could have pictured the rhythm of a perpetually fluctuating attitude to life and of the violent struggle of ideas that was still going on in her own time. She, too, wanted to read about all these things, to penetrate with his assistance into the core of the image he was making for himself. How exquisite it would be to go on a journey together with Paul through sunny Italy and perhaps even as far as Greece!

There were also moments when Paul's enthusiasm for this world of ancient beauty oppressed her a little. It gave her a shock that awakened her from the dream in which she had been imprisoned, when she heard him talk about ancient Greek divinities as though they were divine in the highest sense of the word. He looked at them and at a medieval madonna with exactly the same look. He was hardly interested in what was represented. All he saw was the manner in which the object was made and the sentiments that must have animated the artist. Of course it was foolish of her to be shocked by some expression which was intended to give no offence to any one, least of all to herself. But she could not help it. She was only a girl who had grown up in the habit of honouring the Saints and the Mother of God.

She could not imagine any other way of celebrating her marriage than by a religious ceremony in the church. She worried a little because Paul went to Mass very rarely, and probably only out of consideration for Mama's susceptibilities. She ventured to question

him on the matter but his reply was entirely reassuring. Of course they would get married in church, even if it were only because of the significant beauty of the religious sacrament. Moreover he understood very well that there was no alternative. He added that he could not imagine a greater happiness than to be united in wedlock with her by dear old Father Aigner. In order to please the old priest, he said, he would henceforth not miss a single Sunday Mass.

Elisabeth preferred not to discuss Paul's reasons. She was too happy to have his consent. She blushed with pleasure when a little later Father Aigner told her with a merry wink how pleased he was with her for having brought a lost sheep back to the fold.

The people on the farm were surprised at the change in Paul von Brandt's manner and appearance. They attributed it entirely to Elisabeth's influence. He used to keep obstinately aloof, and now his heart opened to every one. He stopped for a talk with the labourers in the field, visited the stables with young Eisengruber, and dropped in for a friendly cup of coffee with the old farmer and his wife, who were gradually retiring from active business and had little matter for conversation apart from their son. They expected that under Toni's administration the farm would know a period of renewed prosperity.

Paul also went out with Franz, the forester, and his younger son, Hansi. The elder boy was doing his military service and Franz missed him very much. He could not get used to going out with one son only. It seemed to him the breaking of a lifelong habit. On the other hand, of course, both Brigitte and he were proud of their gunner who was to come on leave for the first time this summer. Yes, the parting had been particularly heavy for Brigitte, because, as Herr von Brandt no doubt knew, she had always been such a wise mother to them both. Look, here was the portrait which Franzl had sent. Didn't he look handsome in this uniform? Franz beamed with pride at the sight of the traditional militiaman's photograph. Paul looked at it and handed it back with a smile.

Paul also tried to draw nearer to the Major. Georg anyhow was already full of the most friendly sentiments towards his future son-in-law, whom he now found was so much more loyal than he had ever dared hope. Elisabeth noted with delight how they rode away together one day in order to inspect the fields where the wheat ears were already swelling. They went out together more often after this first occasion. The workers in the field drew themselves up to greet their squire and to rub the perspiration from their faces. When they saw the two of them discussing the state of the crops, they began to wonder whether perhaps Herr von Brandt would one day be the Major's successor. Master Rudi was an officer and young Stephan also looked like one of those who would prefer town life. Of course

they did not venture to speak like this; they were masters of their own silent thoughts. They knew that young Eisengruber would be one of those learned farmers who knew better than the veterinary surgeon what was wrong with a cow, and who understood diseases of the crops better than the gentlemen who wrote articles about them in the local paper. The Slovene harvesters last summer shook their heads when they heard of it: a farmer should not have too much learning. That was only tempting the evil one.

These suppositions about Paul von Brandt received further confirmation because he had such long discussions with Toni Eisengruber about agriculture. It was his vacation now, but his mind was always active and, with that German thoroughness of his, he read up anything he had been discussing in the daytime in Georg's agricultural textbooks. It is probable that he felt attracted by young Eisengruber. Elisabeth said that she almost felt jealous because he spent most of his time on the farm. He consoled her with a laugh: "You know, we don't discuss wheat and barley and potato diseases all the time. Yesterday Toni and I talked about you!"

"About me?"

"Yes, about the time when you and Rudi were children."

She turned away abruptly. Somehow this was a subject that ought not to have been mentioned. She could not have explained why she felt upset. But as soon as she was reminded of her childhood, that same dreadful picture rose before her eyes: Toni down below on the road, holding in his arms the limp body of dying little Stephan. It was the only thing she could never bring herself to discuss with Paul. He was bound to have heard of the dreadful accident that had for ever cast its shadow across Maria-Licht. It was only in order to avoid calling up painful memories in her that he had always avoided the subject so far.

Had Toni given him the whole story now? All the better, because one day he must know. She ought to feel grateful to Toni for having spared her the dreadful task. She sank against Paul's shoulder and, with her hands before her eyes, she leaned her head against his breast.

On the appointed day the two young men arrived from Czernowitz. Rudi brought two other friends with him, young officers whose acquaintance the girls had made during their visit to Vienna: Gustav and Max von Meskovich. Mizzi von Strada arrived with her mother from Vienna, accompanied by the inevitable Fritzl, who was apparently unable to forget Angélique and hoped that in the absence of competition he would perhaps count a little more for her. He had more or less invited himself. Vera sent her excuses: she did not feel well and was afraid of the journey. Her father also stayed behind because he found it difficult to get away owing to work.

The old castle suddenly grew animated, and although in this month of June there was work enough for all the maids on the farm, Toni had to dispense with two of them for the sake of the guests. Married and sixty-year-old Anna were hardly able to cope with the work in the kitchen. Ignaz helped them peel potatoes and wash vegetables, and he had also to look after his little daughter Hanni who was continually getting in the way. Meanwhile the young officers, who were used to giving orders, called him to the stables on the slightest pretext.

In the past Magdalena Eisengruber used to assist in the kitchen on such occasions, but now she was feeling too old. Also, she had to cook in the farm because the maids were so busy and because Toni could not be persuaded to go and find a wife. This worried his mother very much. Both his sisters had left by now and she had to look after his linen. Did he imagine that this would go on for ever? Magdalena would have liked to devote herself entirely to her old husband who was often kept in his chair by sciatica. She hoped that on the occasion of this engagement, which would be celebrated by the whole neighbourhood, Toni would come across the right girl. Of course, she would have to be a farmer's daughter; he might have learnt ever so much in town, but he was in duty bound to choose a country girl. It would be an unpardonable offence if, as people sometimes whispered, he were to think himself too good for this. Magdalena came from town herself but she would not hear of his taking a wife from town. And there was certainly no lack of choice for the handsome, able young farmer of Maria-Licht.

Viennese Mizzi was delighted with this expedition. She did not know what she liked best, the funny oil lamps and candelabra that were lit when one undressed at night, or the whole romantic castle with its turrets and its fortifications and its atmosphere of "Sister Ann, can you see anything coming?" Everything was equally delicious! Gustav, the rides on horseback through the woods and the fields over which hung the sweet perfume of the broom and of ripening wheat; the orchards round the farm with cherry trees and large blue plums; the excursions to the funny provincial town of Klagenfurt. Mama was never able to accompany them. The boys got hold of a sailing boat and a trip was made to Maria-Worth and from there to Portschach where there was a hotel with a tennis court, and where they drank coffee with whipped cream.

Angélique took part in all this fun. Fritzl, more in love than ever, discovered to his delight that she did not seem to mind if in Dr. Prisswitz's large open car he secretly placed his arm round her. But when she failed altogether to react, he began to wonder whether she had noticed it at all. It appeared sometimes as though she was hardly conscious of what she did or said. It was as though her thoughts were permanently elsewhere. He asked her in a voice full of reproach

whether he mattered at all to her. She merely laughed, and this did not make the situation any clearer.

Possibly Elisabeth would also have noticed the strangeness of her sister's behaviour if she had not so entirely isolated herself with Paul. This had not been her intention, but circumstances brought it about. Right from the beginning there appeared to be a great difference between the mentality of Paul and that of Rudi's friends. Dr. Prisswitz, who was much older, knew the art of being young with these young men. Paul allowed them to go their way; he could laugh with them, but he never took active part in their fun. And naturally Elisabeth stayed with him. She knew perfectly well that in reality he was more youthful even and more enterprising than these wealthy boys, who felt panic-stricken at the thought of any mental effort, and who emulated one another in their chase after little amusements, keeping all their seriousness for an occasional dull discussion of military and political matters and still more for their sporting achievements. They probably made merry in secret at Paul's expense. Well, as to this, Elisabeth did not mind. She was sure Rudi took no part in it. At heart Rudi was probably nearer to Paul than to them.

Meanwhile Elisabeth was very glad to welcome Paul's sister and his brother-in-law when they arrived from Munich. The most curious thing about this Peter Althofer was probably that he wore no beard. In her mind Elisabeth had decided that as he was a painter he must have a beard, and now the man who made his appearance turned out to be a timid, dreamy and delicate-looking man, who would never have dreamt of growing a beard or of looking in any way like an artist. He looked rather awkward while he was being introduced to all those young people, but once he sat down in the carriage he began to talk of the journey and forgot all his shyness. Where other people would only have seen mountains, woods and fields, he appeared to have experienced a number of most wonderful sensations. His wife Lotte let him talk; she rejoiced at the understanding which she could read in Elisabeth's eyes. Paul did not seem to know of whom he was proudest, of his brother-in-law, of his sister whose face told of her motherly pride at being the wife of an artist, or of his Elisabeth who had at once conquered their sympathy. Althofer also brought with him his seventeen-year-old sister, Hilda, a strange mixture of woman and child. She hoped to become an interior decorator. Later she showed a few photographs of her work, and Elisabeth felt suddenly ashamed at her own lack of talent. Paul consoled her by swearing that without her his life would be empty and aimless.

The young officers looked at this beardless Peter Althofer in a friendly manner, but not without a certain mischievous merriment. To be an artist was a thing of which they had naïve and strange

notions. It seemed a queer thing to them to want to paint. How could one submit to voluntary poverty for the sake of a reputation which usually came only after one's death. To them being an artist was much the same thing as being afraid of work. They looked upon the artist's life as a kind of unmanly idleness, as a desire to be perpetually admired by women and as a ceaseless search after the ideal model that would make one immortal just as the Mona Lisa made Leonardo da Vinci immortal. In the case of Althofer they found all their suspicions confirmed by the silent adoration of the two women who accompanied him. This little Hilda was by no means a bad sort, but the deadly earnestness of her eyes would discourage any young man!

The arrival of the guests from Munich deepened the chasm that separated the military element from the intellectuals. The older von Meskovich, Max, was no longer able to conceal his feelings from his brother. Upon first acquaintance in Vienna he had fallen for Weygand's sister Elisabeth, and he thought it intolerable that she seriously thought of marrying this dull German who had run away from the army and deserved the profoundest contempt from the officers' caste to which he refused to belong.

On the day before the betrothal Uncle Otto and Aunt Julia arrived. Uncle Otto was as jovial as ever and thought the presence of all these young officers delightful. He listened to their stories of garrison life while his hand slowly stroked his grey moustache. At one time he had been in garrison at Kolomea, not far from Czernowitz, and he smiled at his old memories. Since his retirement he regretted his lost authority. A colonel who had doffed his uniform seemed no longer to count in the world. Even Julia refused to take him seriously and said he was an old growler. But these young officers, at any rate, still knew who he was and what he had been. They addressed him by his rank and took a slightly stiffer attitude when he explained to them his ideas about the army, about the reappointment of Conrad von Hotzendorff as chief of staff, or when he expressed his concern at the fact that the heir to the throne, who was supervising the manœuvres in Bosnia, intended to make a solemn entry into Sarajevo. Otto thought it a mistake to choose for this ceremony the day when the Servians remembered the national hero who, on a June morning of the year 1389, crept into the enemy camp and murdered Sultan Murav in his tent an hour before the decisive battle between the old Servian empire and the Turks.

That night Elisabeth did not sleep well. But the following morning her unrest gave way before the kindness she felt on all sides. The young men rose early in order to put green boughs and flowers about the house and to hang out the flag from the tower. At breakfast Aunt Julia pressed her to her heart like a mother, and Papa shook hands

so vigorously with Paul that Elisabeth could no longer doubt his feelings. She was given innumerable presents and, instead of a useful piece for her future household, Rudi gave her a delicate golden chain. Paul was boundlessly proud and happy and whispered his admiration into her ear as though he were a lovesick youngster.

The glorious summer weather of the last few days was still holding. A large party in the old family coach followed by two cabs, and a dog-cart from the farm driven by Toni Eisengruber, escorted by a cavalcade of merry young men in uniform, moved to the church for Sunday Mass. Father Aigner devoted a passage in his sermon to the betrothed couple from the castle, and later in the sacristy, when they had exchanged rings, he blessed them. Mama, Aunt Frieda, and Aunt Julia cried. Elisabeth bravely laughed through her tears. Outside, the whole of Seekirchen seemed to have collected, and when she stepped with Paul into the carriage they burst out in loud acclamations. Another and equally noisy reception awaited them at the castle. Dr. Prisswitz had sent a basket of roses that was larger even than Paul's bouquet. Still with her smile of happiness on her face, Elisabeth submitted to the teasing about this ardent admirer. After a hasty lunch preparations for the evening began. A long table was placed in the courtyard. The band were to sit on the covered balcony above and later they would move to the meadow where there would be dancing. The farm servants were already transporting all available chairs and benches and, under Toni's direction, a buffet was being constructed.

Under the severe eye of Anna, who wanted to save her the disgrace of a failure, Elisabeth was baking a gigantic cake full of surprises. Rudi and Stephan were rehearsing the dialogue they intended to recite later in the day. Stephan was going to take the part of the youthful god Cupid while Rudi was to be a hoary and venerable Father Time. There were others who felt prompted to contribute something to the celebrations. Although her husband's nephew did not appear to relish the idea, Aunt Julia revealed that she had made a poem for the occasion. Hilda Althofer was painting the menus and every one suddenly admired her artistic talents. Fritzl thought he would please her by whispering to her that in his opinion she had more talent than her brother. Inspired by the sudden wealth of flowers in the house Althofer made an aquarelle of a mixed bouquet which he offered to his future sister-in-law as soon as it was ready. She was so grateful that she wanted to kiss him, but she was too shy to do it in front of all these people. Old Anna allowed herself to observe that it would have been more seemly to paint Herr Paul's bouquet.

Towards five o'clock the first guests appeared. Dr. Prisswitz drove up the courtyard with loud honks. His car was entirely adorned with

coloured ribbons and he himself looked like a bridegroom. He wore ceremonial black clothes with a large buttonhole and his face was red with the sun and with excitement. He obviously intended to enjoy the evening and, even if there remained in him a distant memory of his own great disappointment, there was little doubt that he was going to overcome and forget it. On the way down he fetched Father Aigner and insisted on pinning a rose on the priest's frock. The maids, who were laying the table, laughed when they saw them step together from the car, Dr. Prisswitz jovially holding the priest by the arm.

Ignaz came back with a few notables from Seekirchen whom he had fetched in the coach. Burgomaster Eckbauer was still as healthy, as florid, and as imposing as twenty-five years ago when he directed the celebrations on the occasion of Georg's return with Maria on the day of their wedding. The musicians had to walk from Seekirchen and had not yet arrived when Ignaz announced that dinner was served. They only appeared after the hors-d'œuvres, and beneath the reproachful glance of the burgomaster they rushed to their seats upstairs. A few moments later the first sound of the brass instruments filled the yard. But even without the music everybody felt happy. Aunt Julia was flirting with her two neighbours, Dr. Prisswitz and the burgomaster, and at the same time she was making eyes at the parish priest opposite her. She seemed entirely oblivious of the fact that thus to put temptation in the way of this good man must have been a heinous sin. Arnim was the life and soul of his own end of the table. Mizzi laughed so much that she could hardly find time for eating. Then Anna was fetched from her kitchen to be congratulated on the engagement tart, decorated with two names written in a heart beneath two sugar doves. The design was her very own invention.

The hour for the speeches had arrived. Father Aigner spoke first and then came Georg. He was greatly moved, and Aunt Frieda and Aunt Julia had to produce their handkerchiefs. Elisabeth would certainly have cried in unison with them had she not told herself beforehand that there was to be no weakness on any account. When her grey-haired father came to the end of his speech and raised his glass towards her with a rigid military gesture, she rose, rushed towards him, and kissed him on both cheeks. Now Dr. Prisswitz got up, and in the comical tone he had kept from his student's years he expressed his joy at the happiness of these two young people. He made every one laugh by declaring that as a bachelor he was in the best position for appreciating how happy they were. As he sank back much relieved into his chair and turned once more to his witty neighbour, he failed to see the glance which Elisabeth directed towards him.

Rudi made the kind of speech that was to be expected from him

and had much success when he announced that he had discovered his sister's great secret long before she knew it herself. Every one laughed, and Elisabeth also forced herself to laugh, but she was the only one who noticed how he had to make an effort to keep his mind here and not to think of other things. Thereupon Arnim spoke about a wedding boat that was going to navigate classical waters when, perhaps before the end of the year, it would sail away from the safe harbour of Maria-Licht. He trusted that the bridegroom would follow the example of Ulysses and would get himself roped to the mast if ever the song of sirens tried to draw him towards dangerous rocks. But, he said, with a passenger like Elisabeth there was no doubt that the ship would be steered safely between Scylla and Charybdis!

When nobody else seemed to have anything more to say, Paul got up to express his own thanks and those of his fiancée. He did it with so much simplicity and in such a touching manner that even Aunt Julia began to think a little more highly of him. Max had to admit silently that this Doctor Bookworm, although he was a runaway officer, was worth more than he had suspected. Paul spoke about the years he had spent here, about his first arrival, about all the cordiality that had been shown to him from the beginning and had made it so much easier for him to terminate his studies. The vigorous applause with which he was rewarded aroused Elisabeth from her meditation. She had to touch glasses with him now, with her eyes on his, and he kissed her in the presence of everybody. It was half-dark by the time they all marched to the meadow in procession behind the band. The coloured Chinese lanterns made it look like a green hall. The sky was overcast and a sultry warmth lay over the woods and the fields, but it looked as though the rain would not come down for another couple of hours. Ignaz and Brigitte, who had rapidly put on old-fashioned peasant costumes, played a one-act sketch on an improvised stage. They represented a quarrelling married couple. The wife had listened to an evil-tongued neighbour and in her fury she had put too much salt in the soup and the potatoes. The furious husband threw the plates from the table. But all ended well because they found out that they were still fond of each other. The wife decided to apply the poker with which she had first intended to belabour her husband to the back of her wicked neighbour. The moral was clear, and Paul and Elisabeth had to give a solemn assurance that they would never forget it.

The band began a waltz and to Elisabeth's delight Paul bent towards her and invited her to dance. He did quite well although he had always pretended not to be able to dance. In her pride she sent him to her mother for the next dance. She also wanted him to ask Aunt Frieda, Aunt Julia, and Aunt Louise. She assisted him with the movements of the peasant quadrille so that he cut quite a presentable figure.

Then came an intermezzo with recitations, wise counsels with rhymes that sounded like a bell, in the true manner of the countryside. There was a philosophical dialogue between Chronos and Cupid. Father Time, with his scythe, his hour-glass and his grey beard, wrapped in a white sheet, expressed his doubt whether love could withstand the effect of time. Cupid, the light-footed and winged young god, gave him witty and appropriate replies delivered with profound conviction, and declared that he had the recipe for eternal love. All that was needed for it was that each time one of the lovers spoke an inconsiderate word, he should be made to place a ten groschen piece in a little pot. At the end of the year a present could then be bought with the proceeds of the fines. Afterwards Cupid shot his quiverful at the spectators and Aunt Julia laughed till she cried because one of these harmless arrows threatened her large bosom. Dr. Prisswitz was just in time to catch it. She had already danced with so many people that she could hardly remember them all, but again and again the doctor returned for her because no one waltzed with as much verve as she. When Dr. Prisswitz, who had placed the arrow in his breast pocket, appeared once more she noticed that her poor Otto was feeling out of it, and therefore she freed her arm from the grip of the too gallant physician and drew her husband into the dance. The rejected suitor looked a little surprised, but when he saw her laugh at him he laughed back. It was impossible to mind anything from Aunt Julia.

Prisswitz suddenly felt bold enough to ask Elisabeth for a dance. He could not believe that he was really holding her in his arms. He tried to hold her in a manner that would be expressive of his profound respect, but the wine and the emotion of the dance had such an overpowering effect that he could not help delivering himself of a melancholy declaration: "Elisabeth, I can now reveal a secret to you, but you must never tell any one else. If twenty years ago I had discovered somebody like you, I swear to you that I would not have remained a bachelor. And then I would be a great surgeon in Vienna, instead of prescribing pills and potions in this little place." She smiled warmly at him. She felt so happy. Perhaps she wanted to console him, and she did perhaps not realize how cruel the answer was which she returned: "But then I would not have you as a friend."

"No," he said. He had himself laid bare the old wound, not knowing that it could still hurt so much. Still, he had at any rate made his confession. It gave him a bitter-sweet satisfaction to know that she was at last informed of the great disappointment of his life. There was no need now ever to refer to it with a single word.

Oh, Elisabeth did understand him very well. Even if his words had not made it all clear to her, his silence would have done. His confession, on the day of her engagement, was like a precious present

which in a strange way made her happiness even deeper, although at the same time it brought sadness to her heart.

After this dance her eyes sought, not Paul, but Rudi. He came towards her at once. "I haven't had a single dance with you yet," he said. He had not yet removed his Father Time disguise. He had merely placed the scythe against a tree and, after the example of Roman senators, he held a corner of his toga over his shoulder. While he smiled at her she looked into his eyes, suddenly unable any longer to bear her guilt alone. "Rudi, although Vera and I were unable to hit it off in Vienna, I would have tried to be friendly towards her. She ought to have understood this. Why didn't she come? Even though she might not have wished to see me, you were here!"

"A moment, little sister," he said. "This skirt seems to cramp my style after all." He stepped out of it and, at the same time, pulled his beard from his chin. "Now then, let's go on dancing." Rudi was doing his best to show to her that he forgave everything this evening, but in her desire to be forgiven she had revealed the whole poverty of Vera's feelings for him. She did not venture to refer again to the matter.

The dancing and the wine made people warm. Hot-faced farm labourers disappeared with their girls into the dark cover of the wood. After a little while they reappeared with ruffled hair. A few Chinese lanterns had already burnt out, and Ignaz climbed on a box in order to place new candles in them. The maids pretended to support him, but in reality they were trying to push him into each other's arms. Mariedl, who was serving drinks behind the buffet that was draped with bunting and streamers, occasionally cast a distrustful glance in his direction, but she could not interfere. Neither could she dance with Ignaz; she was pregnant once more and did not want to make herself ridiculous.

The young men thought it would be fun to stage a Chinese procession through the wood. Every one agreed at once with the proposal and Aunt Frieda asked for a lamp. They walked round arm in arm singing in democratic unison. Sometimes those in front cheered and rushed ahead. A group that could not follow so quickly stayed behind and laughed. In the alternating light and dark the men kissed the maids, Gustav kissed Mizzi, and Dr. Prisswitz made a mistake in the dark and kissed the burgomaster's daughter. It was only after she had wriggled herself free from his embrace that he noticed to his horror that he was no longer holding the jolly peasant girl with whom he had been dancing. He let go of her very quickly and moved towards the wife of the Colonel from Graz. He realized that he would now have to restrain himself a little and therefore he took the head of the procession with her, straight behind the music, and shouted to every one that wisdom and virtue would now lead the way. Dr. Prisswitz

was feeling as young as in his best student's years. He had completely overcome his previous weakness. He had told Elisabeth of his love, a thing he would never have thought himself brave enough to do. Now he celebrated his own courage with noisy songs and he felt that to-day, at any rate, life was kind to him. The little lady on his arm might be rather ripe, but she was well preserved, still quite daring, and she was friendly and kind. She asked him whether she must continue to call him Doctor, whereupon he begged her to call him Romeo. Her laugh told him that if only her husband had not followed her everywhere with his stern sergeant-major's eye she might have had more kindnesses for him. Yes, Abel Prisswitz was beginning to feel enough of this strict supervision. He hoped that soon there would be an opportunity to disappear and to find that soft milkmaid who danced the polka with such abandon. He thought he had something to tell her in private. Meanwhile he sang Latin student songs and, with a Tyrolese hat made of paper over one ear, he conducted the singing with his Chinese lantern.

As they were crossing the meadow a gloomy face suddenly appeared before the doctor. He shone the light of his lantern on it, and discovered that the face belonged to his manservant, whose greatest delight was to carry bad news and whom he was in the habit of calling the bird of ill omen. "What . . . you here?" asked Prisswitz, leaving the procession, wondering what was wrong. Someone else was already dragging away Julia and he was left alone with this melancholy messenger, whom he cursed for spoiling his fun. Of course, he was going to tell him of an S.O.S. sent out by one of the expensive patients who couldn't be put off till to-morrow and to whom he also preferred not to send his substitute. "Tell me, who is it? The old Beckmann woman again?"—"No, doctor, the Rossmeyers."

Of course, it would be the Rossmeyers! No way of escaping their summons. The whole family were patients, and all of them rolling in money. If he lost one patient in that clan he lost them all. He began to feel more kindly towards old Johann, who had mounted his bike at this late hour in order to prevent such a catastrophe. "Which Rossmeyer?" he enquired with a sigh.—"The one behind the church."—"I see, the old man himself! And what's the matter with him now?"—"They thought it was a stroke, doctor."—"Yes, yes, they would call it a stroke. I dare say he's had too much dinner. Why should that old money-grubber suddenly get a stroke?"—"They thought it might be due to the excitement, doctor."—"What excitement?"—"You don't mean you haven't heard, doctor?"—"No, what ought I to have heard?" Johann gazed at him in amazement: "Why, doctor, the whole town is upside down. In Bosnia they've . . ."

Johann told a tale that was almost too dreadful to believe. Abel

Prisswitz was speechless as he looked at the face of his old servant, covered in sweat and profoundly moved. His stupidity, his proverbial lack of imagination, made him such a deadly accurate informant. Prisswitz realized that he ought to make an effort to return to reality and to take in the meaning of what he had heard. But he tried in vain. There was something about this night-time message that made it seem like a nightmare. He was struck by the spectral silence around him. The others had wandered away, and it seemed to him that from a great distance the sound of a bell floated towards him. He rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand and shivered. He had almost forgotten Herr Rossmeyer's stroke. It was a mere incident, it did not matter at all. Only one question mattered: ought he to tell the news to the others or ought he to disappear unobtrusively with Johann? The idea of allowing Elisabeth's engagement to pass undisturbed while the whole of Austria shuddered with horror had something incredibly fascinating. Later on Elisabeth was bound to admire his strength of mind. "Come along, Johann!" He threw down his Chinese lantern and crushed it with his feet to put it out.

Just at this moment the procession came in sight, winding its unsteady way towards him. The other guests saw that he intended to leave. They tried to cut off his retreat. "Where are you going to, doctor? You can't leave us like that, you know! No, no, we won't let him go!" They formed a circle and danced round Prisswitz and his man. It was very painful. One or two probably realized that something serious had happened. They wanted to ask him, but the music was too loud. Close to him he suddenly saw the red and excited face of the peasant girl with whom he had danced the polka. She looked at him with her most enticing expression. But no, it was impossible to stay. He slowly raised his hand.

"Silence!" a few of the older ones exclaimed. One after the other the musicians ceased to play.

Dr. Prisswitz cleared his throat. "If what my man here tells me is true, it's our duty to stop this celebration at once!" He turned away from the faces that were still merrily incredulous and, addressing Georg and the Colonel from Graz, he said:

"The heir to the throne and the archduchess have been murdered at Sarajevo."

The following morning the special supplement of the paper confirmed the news. Georg and Otto rode to Klagenfurt to hear the latest bulletin: the whole land was basking in the sun, and the bright light only increased their depression. On the field labourers and maids stood together in little knots, discussing instead of working, and they ran towards Georg to ask whether there really was going to be war with Servia. The bulletin outside the town hall

merely announced that an immediate investigation was being held to find the persons who were behind the murders. The evening papers anxiously avoided any mention of the word "war." Telegrams brought news of profound sympathy from all over the world, with the exception of Belgrade, where flags were flying and processions were celebrating the event. In cafés, it was alleged, people drank to the death of the archdukes. Of course it was the duty of the monarchy to follow the dark trail wherever it might lead, and to penetrate right into those haunts of vice where men conspired against ruling monarchs. The country population took note of all these announcements with considerable satisfaction. They knew at any rate that the highest authorities in Vienna were looking after everything, so that they could go back to their fields and gather in the harvest before the thunder-storm which had been threatening for days.

While the investigations proceeded without much promise of success, the provincial newspaper kept its readers in a constant state of tension with pathetic articles about the solemn return of the archducal couple. There was first the journey in a cruiser, with the flag half-mast, and the sombre greetings of the coast batteries thundering in the distance. Then there was the special train from Trieste with the funeral carriage draped in black. It had been arranged for the archduchess to be given a separate funeral; she was not of sufficiently exalted birth to be buried in the Hapsburg vault. But in his will the archduke had expressed the wish to rest by her side in the vault he had built himself on his estate in Lower-Austria. Every one knew how attached the friendless Archduke Francis Ferdinand had been to the wife whom he had married against the old Emperor's wish. Their joint funeral, for which emperors and kings forgathered, offered new material for a nationalist orgy in the press. Vivid descriptions were published of the way in which the two dead bodies crossed the Danube, lashed into fury by a tempestuous wind. At Pechlarn, the legendary town of the Nibelungen, such an incredible thunder-storm broke over the procession that the horses had to be unharnessed till the anger of the Nibelungen was appeased. The dead man was now regarded as the idol of the monarchy, and the old Emperor's grief was described in heartrending terms; every one tried to forget the universally acknowledged fact that the Emperor had never been able to bear his nephew.

Louise von Strada returned at once to Vienna: she hoped that things would be more interesting in the capital. She would not allow Mizzi to stay by herself. Gustav now carried her photograph on his heart and, armed with this talisman, he was prepared to brave death on any battlefield. Otto went away with his Julia because he wanted to hear the views of his cronies at the officers' circle in Graz. Fritzl stayed behind while the other young men were there. It did him good

to feel surrounded by all these uniforms, and sometimes he forgot that he was not a soldier himself.

The house-party came to an end not because military leave was cancelled, but because the leave of the young men was coming to an end in any case. Rudi suggested that they should all travel by way of Vienna and spend a last day there. Among those who felt this keenly was Hilda, though she controlled herself heroically while taking leave. She was happily unaware of the reason of this earlier departure. Elisabeth held her arm round the girl in a sisterly fashion while the train drove out of Seekirchen station. She waved at Rudi like the others and at the same time she felt the nervous twitching of the shoulders of this curiously passionate little girl. Rudi admired her drawings and her sketches, but why had he no eye for herself? Why did he stare himself blind upon this intolerable Vera? No doubt the reason which had kept her away from Maria-Licht was merely some new flirtation. She would still cause much misery to Rudi.

Only Paul's family remained. Peter Althofer soon forgot all about the Sarajevo murder. To believe that it might lead to a world war was, in his opinion, the height of absurdity. And, apart from a few obstinate prophets of woe, the others gradually began to agree with him. He spoke lyrically about the fields with their golden glow and the deep shadows of the woods around, about the amazing thunder-clouds, mysteriously illumined and edged with poisonous purple. He pointed at the crests of the sloping fields far away under those clouds, bathed in darkness and then suddenly drenched in a flood of cadmium-yellow sunshine. He contemplated the feverish activity of the harvesters, their loaded carts and their heavy horses. Everywhere he discovered the dramatic struggle of man against the destructive forces of nature, against the lightning strokes of fate. Georg listened silently to this simple man who saw all things with such intensity, but transferred them into a timeless light. What was this world in which he lived? Georg himself began to feel that there was a deeper meaning in this thunder-storm which brooded over the landscape and would not break. But this symbolism only increased his sense of oppression. He could not understand Althofer's childlike worship of beauty for its own sake. After all, the man was nearly forty! It was impossible to converse with such a fellow!

Georg cast a perfunctory glance at the enthusiastic articles that appeared about the new heir to the throne. But, with an anxiety he was unable to shake off, he studied the foreign telegrams and the news about the progress of the investigation. The press grew less and less communicative on this subject. There did not appear to be much direct evidence involving the Servian government, but even so it was impossible to imagine that the whole thing would be allowed to end so easily. Count Berchtold was an ambitious young minister

who would not accept defeat. He was sure to do all he could in order to unmask Serbia as a dangerous criminal before the eyes of the world. Every friend of justice was bound to agree that it deserved punishment. The German Emperor used big words, as was his wont, and rattled his sabre, in the conviction that this would have no dangerous consequences. He believed that the masterly diplomacy of Vienna would not allow itself rash measures and would wait for the castigation of Serbia until Russia's neutrality had been secured. Germany intended to show that her army made her proof against fear. She also wanted to prove her trustworthiness as an ally. But the German Emperor was impulsive, he had often hunted with the murdered man and he insisted that the monarchy should demand full satisfaction for the wrong it had suffered. He proclaimed that in trying to obtain this Austria could count upon the Nibelung-like fidelity of her German ally.

At first Georg himself thirsted for revenge, but these sentiments gave way very soon when he saw the terror in Maria's eyes. He began to visualize the results of an armed conflict with Serbia and he was full of secret fear for the sake of his son.

A special Austrian commissioner had been sent to Belgrade to investigate the question of responsibility for the murder. Had he discovered any incriminating material? The newspapers were silent on this subject, but their campaign of abuse against Serbia grew bitterer every day. Georg refused to read it any more. In order to distract his thoughts he rode out daily to observe the work in the fields. Nature went her usual course, and it was the wisdom of the peasants to follow that course. When the wheat was ripe it had to be cut and dried and put away in the barns. This was a divine ordinance that seemed infinitely more important than a punitive expedition against Serbia. Georg still hoped that Vienna would distrust reckless action. He took leave from his son in exactly the same way as usually: "Good-bye, boy, till your next leave!"—"Yes, Papa." Rudi was thinking of one thing only, of the day he would spend in Vienna on the way back.

"Till your next leave. . . ." Why did Georg not believe in it himself? At night these words rose before him with spectral insistence. It was as though to the end of his days they would sound mockingly in his ears, these last words to Rudi: "Good-bye, boy, till your next leave." Oh, if only he had been able to take the field by the side of his son! He could still ride a horse, and he believed that he had not forgotten how to wield the sword. But they would refuse his offer of service. He would have to look on from a distance, just as here when they were working in the fields. From day to day, from hour to hour, he would have to wait for the news that his son was still alive.

During these weeks Paul worked hard in the fields and came home only at meal times. He had become very friendly with the Slovene labourers. His affection for Toni Eisengruber was turning into a deep friendship. They were almost on the point of addressing each other with "thee" and "thou." Elisabeth was glad to see how healthy he began to look. His hands and his arms were dark brown with the sun. This was just the kind of holiday he needed before he started work at Munich. Now that there was no more talk of war she ceased to be afraid. But sometimes she fancied with a sudden shock that Paul still thought of war as a possibility, and that he was allowing himself to become so passionately absorbed in this agricultural work merely in order to overcome his secret restlessness. She noticed how he picked up the newspaper at night and threw it away almost at once with an expression of disgust. Oh, surely, he took too pessimistic a view of things! How could everything go its usual restful way about the castle if war were really threatening? She thought she knew what was the matter with him: he hated brute force, and the fact that war had been looked upon as a possibility, even if it were only for a few days, was enough to upset his balance for a long time.

She would have liked to console him and to reassure him, but she was afraid to allude to so dangerous a subject, and in the evening, when they went out for a walk, she held his arm and accompanied him in silence. One evening she was suddenly unable to bear it any longer. Why were his thoughts so far away? "What is it, Paul?" she asked almost reproachfully. He turned towards her and took her in his arms; she moaned because he had never yet embraced her with such passion. Until now he had been protective, friendly, and tender. She felt safe with him, able to dream quietly about all that was waiting for her later when she would be his wife in Munich. Now he disturbed her serenity. He brought about in her a confusion that grew every day. Why did he do it? Was it the result of working in the open air in the midst of all those men? He had always respected the slow growth that was turning her from a young girl into a young woman, and he granted her the happiness of enjoying this transition in all its slight and exquisite shades. Now he was dragging her away from her dream and leading her towards a path from which she could never return once she had set foot on it. It seemed to her that he was driven this way by his restlessness, by a dark and fatal presentiment. She loved him too much to rebuff him. But her happiness was disturbed by a fear; it was fear because of her weakness and still more because of this great change in Paul. He was unable any longer to look into her eyes, and sometimes his eyes dropped when she looked at him. Then a sudden sense of shame assailed her also.

They were sitting side by side on the moss underneath the trees and they looked at the wide undulating landscape above which the evening red was darkening into violet. She felt from his oppressive silence that he was fighting himself. He whispered her name and slowly, greedily, drew her towards him. Unexpectedly she found the strength to resist. She wanted to see him strong, as he was when she began to love him, and as she had admired him since, the master of his passion. "Paul," she asked, and her emotion brought tears into her voice, "why don't you wait a little longer? You do know I belong to you, but . . ." She could not say any more. He looked at her for a while, and then, with a pale face and in a strangely quiet tone, he said: "Don't be angry with me. And get up. I'm a fool." He jumped up and held out his hand to her. She was so grateful and happy that she would have liked to give him what she had just refused. But on the way home he was silent and he did not even appear conscious of the fact that he was staring ahead without speaking. That evening Elisabeth took up a paper and was startled at the tone in which it wrote about Servia. But then she also read that Austria wanted peace, and that the German Emperor was on his yacht. No one except Paul seemed to be really concerned with the immediate future. Well, of course, there was Mama. But Aunt Frieda laughed at her. And Papa . . . She wondered whether he had thought for a moment that war was likely.

There followed days of intolerable tension. The whole monarchy held its breath and every one sought for oblivion in the form of impassioned processions and speeches. The cabinets of Europe had all been shaken out of their slumber. Coded telegrams flew along the wires. Servia seemed to be struck with paralysis, and the government at Belgrade held feverish deliberations. Russia uttered a warning voice and proposed an extension of the time limit, but Vienna remained obdurate. England's proposals of mediation were declined. It was a business that concerned only the monarchy and Servia.

Peter Althofer was at work on a large canvas and went out into the fields every morning. A few days earlier Georg had stopped to look at his work. There he stood, lost in the midst of nature, drunk with sun and light. His host asked him a question to show his courteous interest, and he gave an absent-minded and incoherent reply. He was painting a group of tall silvery poplars that spread out against the white clouds like a gigantic bouquet. His wife was seated behind him, her face bent over her embroidery. Her passive silence showed Georg that he was completely superfluous here and perhaps even a disturbing element. He quickly continued his morning ride. He remained puzzled at the thought that a man could devote his whole life to what was only play, that he could again and again surrender to something that was in the nature of a narcotic. He actually realized

that Althofer did not want to acquire fame. The fellow obviously had no such thought. It was simply a case of being possessed by some kind of ecstasy. One evening at dinner his wife said that he sometimes got up in the middle of the night to look at a picture on which he was working. She was afraid that he might catch cold in doing this. Georg felt he would like to know the purpose of it all. Was not the highest aim a painter could reach the faithful reproduction of nature? But in that case, was there any need to look at a painting, and was it not simpler to step out of doors? There one could see them, those poplars, in every mood of weather and of season! And the clouds were no longer motionless; while the trees trembled and were alive! And at the same time one could breathe the perfumes of the landscape and hear the song of the wind through the leaves or through the naked wintry twigs.

While he spared Maria as much as he could, he took a cruel pleasure in reminding this fellow Althofer that in this world other things mattered beside his paintings. He succeeded in irritating the man and saw clearly that he grew nervous when he gave him the humorous advice to hurry up with his poplars because it was impossible to know how the world would look to-morrow. His own daughter Elisabeth looked at him with an imploring, reproachful glance. Von Brandt, who stared silently in front of him, was of course also on the side of the painter. If only Rudi were here, he at least would take his side! Or would he? Was there such a great merit, then, in being blind to the realities of our world? Georg felt himself all alone in this house. He was in despair at so much stupidity. He was alone, Rudi was far away, and perhaps the day after to-morrow he would have to march into Servia or into Russia. And meanwhile Althofer would continue to paint poplars, and Elisabeth would continue to stand up for him.

Perhaps Elisabeth would have understood a little better what was happening in her father's mind if she had not been preoccupied and tortured by her own thoughts. Paul's curious withdrawal frightened her immensely. He seemed to be lost in himself. And just this afternoon Brigitte came to her, obviously ill at ease, and told her that Angélique was trying to borrow money from her. Brigitte had no idea what she wanted it for, but somehow she felt there was a snag somewhere because Angélique asked for a considerable sum. Angélique wanted fifty crowns! It had kept Brigitte awake that night, and she decided at last that the wisest thing was to go and tell Elisabeth. Elisabeth was upset. Suddenly as in a flash she seemed to know why Angélique had behaved so strangely of late. "Oh . . . so she came to ask you for money? I trust that you did not give her any."

Brigitte pushed back her youngest child who was hanging on her skirts. "Of course not, Miss Elisabeth! Even if I had wanted to, how could I? I would have had to ask my husband and you may be sure that he would have gone straight to the Major. . . ."

"That's right. Thanks very much," said Elisabeth coolly. She suddenly felt a loathing for this woman, who was kind-hearted perhaps, but unwise, and who no doubt found it piquant to be Angélique's confidante, although she betrayed her at the first opportunity. Brigitte felt the unspoken reproach. "Fraulein Elisabeth . . . I don't know whether you discuss these things with her . . . but please don't let her know that I told you anything! I've had to promise not to tell any one."

"If you had kept your promise you would not be in danger now," said Elisabeth contemptuously.

Brigitte opened her eyes with amazement. "But, Fraulein . . . ! I have acted entirely in her own interests, and in order to do a service to you and to your parents. . . ."—"Was it perhaps also in order to render us a service that you helped her to receive letters in secret?" asked Elisabeth. It was merely a guess. Some time ago she had noticed Angélique walking out to the forester's house with a guilty look on her face. And it was enough now to look at Brigitte to know that the suspicion was well founded. The only thing Elisabeth still did not know was what Angélique wanted to do with these fifty crowns. She could only venture one guess, and this was too dreadful to believe.

Brigitte had gone pale, and her lips trembled. She did not know what to reply. Only when Elisabeth turned away, she came after her and hastily added: "Fraulein Elisabeth, if you have to tell your father . . . Franz has never known of it, I assure you."

Elisabeth was walking away and pretended not to hear. But she could not help feeling more kindly after Brigitte's last words. Of course she was not going to tell her father. She was going to talk to Angélique, and at once. She ran straight to her sister's room, which was locked as usual; she knocked hard and before Angélique had the time to ask who was there, she shouted: "Open at once, I've got to talk to you!"

Inside there was silence. Then a chair moved, a cupboard door was opened and closed. Obviously Angélique was putting something away before she opened. Her expression was angry and there were hostile lights in her eyes. Elisabeth came in silently, and closed the door behind her. Then she asked:

"Since when have you taken to borrowing money from the staff?"

Angélique's voice trembled with fury and contempt. "Oh, so Brigitte has been babbling."

"Yes. Next time you might be a little more careful before you

choose your confidante. Do you think you might tell me what you want to do with fifty crowns?"

"You're rather inquisitive."

"If you tell me honestly, I may not have to tell father," said Elisabeth threateningly. There was no reply, and she walked towards her younger sister. But suddenly Angélique read all her weakness and sorrow in her eyes. It almost made her laugh. "Run to Papa and tell him everything," she challenged her.

"Do you want to run away? Is that what you want the money for?" Elisabeth asked in amazement. "Do tell me, Angélique! Do you want to go to Vienna? Is he there? Is he giving another concert?"

From her sister's proud silence she realized that she had guessed the whole truth. So it was a fact, and Angélique had tried to borrow money in order to . . .! Oh, God, supposing Brigitte had given her the money! No, she must not preach, she must try to gain her sister's confidence: "Angélique, I noticed that very evening what you were feeling for him! Only, I thought you'd forget him! But if you are really in love with him, if he answers your letters and still thinks of you, well, then I think it's great, don't you see! But I think it's unwise to correspond with him in secret. And via Brigitte! You see yourself that she can't even keep your secret! Think of all the talk there might be! And then this wild notion of borrowing money from her. Did you imagine that you could go to the von Stradas when you arrived in Vienna?"

Angélique looked at her. "You're talking like an aunt. When I hear you I realize that I'd be a fool if I ever ventured to introduce him here. Besides he probably would refuse to come! You needn't look so surprised. I know you don't understand me. No one understands me here. No one! But it isn't necessary. And I don't mind in the least! I'll do what I like! And just as I like!"

Elisabeth drew a deep breath. "Angélique . . . I do my best to understand you. Please believe me. Even if I've got to try and keep you back because I see that you're on the point of committing a folly for which you'll have to pay heavily one day . . .!"

"So I needn't hope that you will lend me the money for my journey," Angélique remarked with bitter mirth. "Besides I shan't need it after all. He was to play at Bad Ischl, not in Vienna, as you thought. But now, of course, the concert will be put off. I dare say that as a Frenchman he'll do better not to show himself any more in this country. To-day it's still a matter of fighting the Servians and the Russians, but if things turn as Fritzl predicts, the French will soon be our enemies too. And if Papa heard that we are corresponding, or if he knew that Desmond need say only one word and I'll follow him wherever he wishes . . .!" Angélique was losing her self-control and her voice was choked with tears. "I dare say you won't be

able to understand that either. I just don't care even if he's a Frenchman and an enemy! It wouldn't make any difference to me even if Rudi had to go and fight the French!"

"So at present he is not in Austria?" said Elisabeth, pale and extremely nervous, interrupting her last words.

Angélique tried to pull herself together. She bit her lips angrily, and hesitated for a moment. Perhaps she gave way to a feeling of impotence, to an unreasoning hope that Elisabeth might after all be willing in the last extremity to help her. So she revealed her secret: "His last letter was from Venice."

Elisabeth would have liked to reply: "Can I see it?" It was not out of curiosity but because she would have liked to know more about this man, and about the extent of the danger that threatened her sister. She realized what a hold he had on her. And all she wished to know was how he intended to use it.

"I wish I had been with you and Mizzi that evening. I should have liked to hear him play," she said softly. Angélique tossed her head proudly.

Although sharp words had been spoken, this conversation brought the two sisters a little closer together. While Elisabeth was anxiously wondering where this affair might lead Angélique, she was at the same time grateful and happy because her sister had at any rate spoken frankly to her. Moreover, she was glad that Angélique, who talked so often with premature cynicism about life, proved after all to be susceptible to deep feeling. Throughout the day she thought much about the reproaches her sister had addressed to her. Was she really too cold to understand a nature like Angélique's? Was she too cold to Paul? She wanted to ask him; she wanted him to give her a truthful answer. Perhaps she thought too much of herself, and did not take sufficient trouble to place herself in the position of other people. But what if she saw people move towards a catastrophe. Ought she still to try and understand rather than intervene?

And meanwhile Elisabeth tried with all her power to go on believing that there would be no war, that Paul would once more breathe freely, and that the French would never become the enemies of the Austrians. Perhaps Angélique would yet come back to her senses. . . .

The reply of the Servian government which arrived just before the end of the forty-eight hours' time limit seemed at first sight entirely satisfactory. Belgrade merely asked that the demands should be toned down in a few instances, and proposed, if necessary, that the Court of Arbitration should pronounce on them. All this appeared eminently reasonable. A sigh of relief passed over Austria. Soon it rose into a tempered expression of jubilation. A victory had been achieved not by the force of arms but simply by the prestige of right. But it was the kind of victory that did not suffice Vienna. Why did the papers

announce that the Austrian minister in Belgrade had applied for his passport immediately after the receipt of Serbia's reply? Why was he already this side of the Danube? Was it to be war after all? Serbia seemed to expect nothing else, and was mobilizing for the third time in two years. The government moved away from Belgrade, which was in reach of the Austrian guns, and went southward to Nish. Partial mobilization was proclaimed in the Austrian monarchy.

One realized now that Vienna was no longer concerned with the triumph of right. It wanted to use a favourable opportunity for crushing Serbia. The meek reply of Belgrade showed that after years of public as well as secret support Russia hesitated after all to put its hand into the fire for the benefit of its little Slav brother.

The people of Austria and Hungary still found it difficult to follow the amazing succession of events. The information that poured in was hard to digest. The press appeared to be well ahead of public opinion, and clamoured for the immediate opening of hostilities. It urged that the Servian campaign would be over in a few weeks' time and would at last bring rest to the Balkans. Russia was afraid of a major conflict. Its hands were tied with its 150,000 strikers. It was said that Rasputin did not want war. There was no reason for allowing precious time to be lost, and news had just arrived that near Temes-Kubin Servian monitors on the Danube had bombarded Austro-Hungarian troops!

The avalanche was on the move and nothing seemed able now to arrest it. Precisely one month after the Sarajevo murders war was declared against Serbia. There were obstinate rumours about a Russian mobilization, and although denials were issued the rumours could not be stifled. What was the matter with Vienna? Had there been a miscalculation after all? Was Russia preparing for war? The Emperor William was asking for explanations from the Tsar.

Special editions of the papers brought triumphant headlines in which the probability of an extension of the conflict was glibly put forward. There was a tendency to forget that the first ultimatum came from Austria-Hungary, and the monarchy, with its German ally, was presented as an innocent and pacific power upon which the whole world was preparing to throw itself like a pack of tearing wolves. Happily God was on the side of justice and a firm confidence in Austria's armies was justified. They would at last be given a chance to prove their invincible might. The press glorified the amazing unanimity of the monarchy. Who would dare speak any more of inner conflicts? Now that the testing time had arrived, Austrians, Hungarians, Czechs and Croats, Slovenes and Slovaks, Roumanians and Ruthenes were solid behind the old emperor! A few Czech traitors who had taken refuge abroad and were preparing to sell the blood of their brothers hardly deserved to be mentioned. At the last

moment the socialists realized where their civic duty lay, and it was confidently expected that they would not dare vote against a war loan. Dangerous enemies of the people, saboteurs like Friedrich Adler and the German Karl Liebknecht, would soon be made innocuous. The Tsar had dropped his mask, given up all further pretence, and proclaimed the mobilization. Germany was waiting for the answer to its ultimatum to Russia and France.

Georg fled from Maria's oppressive company and rode to town, not knowing what he expected to get out of the trip. Stephan wanted to accompany him. He was madly excited and all along the road he talked boyish nonsense, a hash of notions picked up in the newspapers. "War between Germany and Russia!" was the first cry that resounded in their ears as they entered Klagenfurt. It had a mighty and deafening sound, and no one was able to realize what it implied. People shouted and cheered and fell in each other's arms, because Germany was going to pay its debt to the monarchy with the blood of its sons. Every hour new and glorious messages were to be expected! Oh, perhaps it was a privilege after all to be allowed to live through this moment. Pale with emotion Georg looked at the men who were obeying their mobilization orders and marched to the station, singing and displaying banners, while the frenzied crowds cheered them. He placed his arm protectingly round Stephan, who would have liked to go too. It was the first time that he felt this younger son was really a child of his.

On the station square, where a military band was playing, the notary-public, a seventy-year-old man with Francis Joseph side-whiskers, broke through the reticence of a lifetime and began to explain to him that even if the whole of Europe became involved, this war could not possibly last more than a month. Georg said nothing. He stared in front of him disapprovingly: a notary-public was not going to give a course in strategy to an ex-officer. Not more than a month! He saw before his eyes the endless steppes of Russia. Stephan and he were walking now. The crowds were so dense that they had left their horses in Dr. Prisswitz's garage. They went to the post office to send a telegram to Rudi. Georg had been thinking of it the whole night: "Our thoughts are with you." It was an hour before his turn came, because so many people were queueing up in front of the counter. The Major was not used to being kept waiting, but he took it with the greatest patience. He could have sent Dr. Prisswitz's man, but he wanted to dispatch the message himself.

On the way home he first called at the farm where the latest news appeared also to have arrived. The men who belonged to the classes that were called up were packing their belongings although old Eisengruber begged them to wait till next day and to help him first with the threshing. The old farmer was bitterly angry because of this

war and refused to recognize the compelling force of a mobilization order. Did those fools in Vienna imagine that he could do all the work this summer with the maids and a few superannuated men? Was it not enough that he had had to give up his son for three years? Now they wanted his Toni again. He would have to go next day while his father, tortured with sciatica, was left to run the farm.

Georg listened to the old man's jeremiads, and felt contemptuous because the farmer mentioned in one breath his son's departure and the worry of running the farm by himself. Georg reflected with grim satisfaction that Eisengruber's stiff joints would bother him a great deal in the months to come.

In the castle everything was confusion. Althofer came to Georg for advice. This morning he had at last finished his great painting, but now he was concerned to know how he could send it to Munich before it was dry. His wife and his sister were going to leave next day with Paul, who had to join his regiment. Maria had retired to her bedroom and lay down in the dark with closed curtains. Frieda told him that she had given her a sleeping powder. She asked how things were in town. He tried to give her an impression in a few words, but she sighed and looked at him with mute reproach as though it would have been in his power to prevent this war.

He wandered through the house in search of Elisabeth and found her at last helping von Brandt to pack. She was outwardly calm and held herself as he might have expected his daughter to do. He lingered for a moment, turned towards the window and, without looking at them, told them of the telegram he had sent to Rudi. Elisabeth looked up nervously and saw his empty stare. He was thinking of Rudi—no one else existed for him. The fact that Paul would also have to go to this war hardly penetrated to him. Here she was packing Paul's clothes and he did not even notice it.

A bitter protest surged through her. Rudi's officer friends had systematically refused to look upon Paul as an equal. When the first mention was made of a possibility of war they had at once demanded for themselves the right to play a tragic and heroic part in it. They had gathered in all the applause. And unconsciously she herself had believed them. But now that a real war was coming Paul had to go and fight for his country just like them. Paul did not work up any patriotic enthusiasm. He went without feeling bellicose, without hatred for the enemy of to-morrow. He was inwardly distressed because he had looked upon all these things as impossible, and had given himself over to the dream that right and not the force of arms would decide in the quarrels between nations. "Perhaps this war has still got to be fought in order to give a final proof of the absurdity of war," he said to Papa. But he received no reply. Why did his words upset Papa? Was this not the most glorious war aim, lofty

enough for him to be able to sacrifice Rudi to it? Did he consider such conceptions less manly than those of the young officers from Czernowitz? Did he not feel that it required more courage to go into battle in this manner, struggling with one's own conscience, than under the narcotic influence of patriotism?

Ignaz came to announce that the farm hands who were called up were on the point of leaving and would like to say good-bye to the Baron. They stood together in the courtyard, a laughing, excited bunch, admired by the maids who had run away from their work. The Slovene day labourers who had come walking across the mountains were going back by rail. They looked forward to this great adventure, because none of them had ever been in a train before. Hans, the forester's second son, was going to enlist as a volunteer. His father stood by his side, pale with pride. His mother stayed at home; she had desperately opposed his plan as long as she could.

Georg made a brief speech and tried to recover from the confusion von Brandt's cruel words had brought about in him. He said precisely the things the men expected from him: that the farm could hardly spare them at this moment, but that the Fatherland and the Emperor could do without them even less. He said he was certain that they would all bravely do their duty. And if they met his son in the field, they were to give him his greetings. They waved their caps and shouted hurrah for the Emperor and for the Baron. "Zivio!" roared the Slovenes, who had not understood a word but who saw that the moment of parting had arrived. Then they marched away. Stephan begged to be allowed to go as far as Seekirchen with Hans, whom he envied very much indeed.

On the platform of the little station the band of St. Cecilia, no longer complete, was waiting to greet the departing soldiers. But before they took the train they entered the church where Father Aigner pronounced his blessing over these young peasants who were kneeling before him, ready to go to the war as though it were a festival. The organ played, and the whole church was filled with the perfumes of the field bouquets that had been brought to the Holy Virgin and the saints. Some of the smaller statues were entirely hidden by flowers and burning candles. The wives and the mothers who filled the back benches burst out sobbing when the parish priest expressed the wish that many of those who were leaving now might come back hale and hearty. He would have preferred to say all of them, but if they were going to fight like heroes as was expected of them, a few might be left behind on the field of battle. He prayed that God might assist them in their dying hour.

The people at the castle stayed up late that night. Toni Eisengruber came to say good-bye and Paul asked him to stay a little. Was he

afraid of having to be left alone with the old Major? Even now there were long pauses. It was as though in the silence one heard from afar the gigantic war machine gathering impetus and preparing for that long period when it would work of its own accord, bigger and stronger than the men who set it in motion. Trains rolled by in all directions, according to the prearranged and secret scheme of mobilization. While the night spread silent and serene over the woods and the countryside, the towns were vibrating with feverish life, directing the gigantic apparatus of death. Where was the human hand that would stop it all?

There was hardly any doubt left that France would enter the war. They discussed, therefore, the attitude England would adopt. Toni thought it would be wise not to expect too much from momentary domestic difficulties. Here in Austria the south Slavs hated the Hungarians, the Czechs hated the Germans, and yet they all marched in unison. In Budapest, where people usually refused to rise for the Imperial Anthem, it had been listened to with tears, and in Prague and Agram it was just the same. Would the British behave differently when they listened to their "God Save the King" and when the cry went through the streets: "There is danger of war!"?

Georg had always been fond of old Eisengruber's son. But he could not bear it very well that here in his old room the young man talked about things of which, as a farmer, he ought not to have known the first thing. It smacked of rebellion, it seemed disrespectful towards himself. It was as though these two young men were conspiring together against him. Probably both of them had learnt a little too much and had forgotten their place. Besides he did not want to hear about England. He wanted to hear about Russia. It was against Russia that Rudi was going to fight.

"England won't find it easy to beat us, as long as it can't put an army in the field against us," he said with some irritation in his voice. What . . .! Was this young farmer actually going to dispute his opinion? "England couldn't beat us with an army it hasn't got—but with its fleet, against which our own is powerless, it can blockade our ports and then we'll lack everything. War against England, with its inexhaustible resources, is like fighting the dragon with the seven heads. It is invincible. . . ."

Elisabeth felt Toni's arguments were making her father angry. Why could he not behave a little more kindly towards the old man? She thought she had noticed for some time that there was something haughty and detached in Toni's attitude. Had he been offended by something? Or could he no longer bear the idea of being employed by them as a farmer here at the head of a small and rather unprofitable concern? Had he been thinking of other plans? Anyhow, for the

time being they would all have to give up their higher aspirations, Paul also.

Insensitive to the painful silence that fell after Toni's words, Angélique suddenly asked whether it was certain that Italy would join in. Elisabeth looked at her sister with a vague revival of attention. She noticed how pale and troubled she looked. She thought she knew what was passing through Angélique's head. But she, too, was preoccupied almost to the exclusion of everything else.

About twelve Toni Eisengruber left, and Papa suggested that they should take a few hours' rest. They would have to leave early for Klagenfurt the following morning. Elisabeth rose with automatic obedience and Paul also got up in order to give her his usual good-night kiss. She looked at him with hesitation: she could not well understand this good-bye before he actually left. And in his eyes she read the same thing; for the first time there had reappeared in them the burning question that was there a week ago when they sat on the moss under the trees looking at the landscape. She could not say anything. She went to her room and undressed quickly and with a shiver.

She lay down until all the others had gone to their rooms. But she was determined not to leave Paul alone during these last few hours that were granted to them. She felt no hesitation, no shame whatever. She wanted to give him what he had asked her in the dark presentiment of their parting. She could not understand how she had withheld it a week ago. She had been foolish and pusillanimous. Without realizing it, Angélique had told her the plain truth. God, how could she let him go without giving him everything she had to give! What if their last hours together were to leave nothing to be remembered except a refusal based upon cool reasoning!

She found it difficult to wait, because she was so impatient to go and prove to him that she realized his mistake. At last she rose, and on her bare feet she found the way to his room. Her hand lingered on the door-knob in a last dreadful hesitation. Then she entered. The light of the moon fell upon her white night-gown and suddenly the whole room seemed illumined. She saw his dark eyes.

"Elisabeth!"

She wanted to say his name but she could not. Only when she felt safely enclosed in his grateful arms her shudders ceased and she was able to speak. Crying with an exquisite emotion she received the kisses with which he first tried to calm her. Then an infinite sweetness came over her, and made her forget everything. She forgot that it was war and in a few hours' time Paul would have to leave, all she knew was that he was her man, her husband, and at the same time her child who pressed his burning head against her heart. She put her arms round him like a mother and like a lover and whispered

passionate words of which she only realized the full meaning by the effect they had upon him. It was as though a shock went through him. She felt him draw back. She was thrown into an unutterable confusion, in a blood-red shame of despair. She suddenly realized that this was the penalty of her cowardice. Now that she had got over her fears, he had reflected, and he refused to accept what she offered him.

"Paul?" she moaned. Oh, she understood him. He was afraid that perhaps he might not come back. But once he became her husband, he would have to return, then he could no longer be missed. "Paul . . . I'm not afraid! I want it, Paul . . . I want it!" She enveloped him and kissed his mouth desperately. Yes, this was how she had wanted him, this was how she wanted to love him. She closed her eyes in order to allow this image to sink into her. She seemed to disappear; she knew no longer what was happening to her. All she knew was that it had been her own will, and that this appalling and amazing thing meant everything, contained everything. Now he belonged to her; now he could never leave her for good. While she moaned softly because of a pain that almost sent her numb, she knew that he, her man, was doing this to her and that for his sake she was ready to suffer this pain and all the pains in the world. She laughed and cried with happiness. "Paul . . . my Paul." Maternally, consolingly, she stroked his body that was still shaking as in pain.

When she crept away at the first sign of dawn, she went without any sense of guilt or of sin. All she carried away was a heavy and a sweet content, a dullness of the head and of the limbs, a vague pain that filled her with a strange pride. The leave-taking that was going to come made her less afraid now.

While dressing she looked outside at the woods rising from their nightly veil. She saw the world with new eyes. She became aware of all the forces of love and creation in nature, she was part of nature. The voice of birds resounded, clear like water, and penetrating. And then she felt suddenly unable to bear the delight of this awakening of the world, and a vague terror seized her. She felt more lonely than she had ever felt before.

Stephan came to announce that breakfast was ready. Her throat was still choked, while she rushed down to pour out coffee for Papa and for Paul. Papa was already waiting near his chair. Paul was keeping him silent company. Her eyes met his for a moment. They had never yet been able to look at one another in this way. Peter Althofer appeared with his wife and his little sister. "Is Angélique not coming down?" asked Papa.

"I took leave from her yesterday evening," said Paul in order to excuse her.

Georg looked upset. He did not mention Angélique any more, and said to Paul: "My wife asks whether you will come to her room to say good-bye—she can't get up." Paul went up at once. When he came back a little later Elisabeth noticed that he was deeply moved. "What is going to happen to Mama?" said Georg with a sigh to his daughter when they were in the carriage. "No human being can do entirely without sleep!" Did he find any sleep himself? Elisabeth had never seen him so uncontrolled and nervy. He was almost rude to Althofer and his wife. Even Paul was treated with lack of cordiality this morning and Georg hardly disguised his impatience while Paul went to shake hands with old Anna. All through breakfast he insisted that they must hurry, although there was still plenty of time. But he was really impatient to read the latest telegrams at Klagenfurt. He wanted to know whether Rudi had already been ordered to march against the Russians. He seemed hardly to realize that Paul would have to leave in a moment because Germany was at war with Russia. Or was it that he simply did not care?

Around the station a crowd was surging: departing men were seen off by their mothers and their sweethearts, by old people and by children. Behind a long table ladies poured out coffee for the soldiers. Many groups were sobbing, a young lance-corporal was standing pale and shamefaced in the midst of his miserable parents and sisters. He tried to calm them with a few consoling words, but meanwhile he looked round to see whether anybody was witnessing his shame. Elsewhere people were exuberant. Some friends had put rings of roses round a departing soldier, they patted him on the shoulder and embraced him. Students' and soldiers' songs were heard everywhere. "If only we had been able to see Rudi off also," said Georg looking round at the crowd. A few newspaper venders came running with the latest edition: Hungarian frontier posts had been killed by mounted Russian patrols. "War! War with Russia!" shouted the crowd excitedly. Germany had declared war on Russia—why did Vienna hesitate to chastise the wild hordes of the bloody Tsar, who were murdering innocent frontier posts? "War! War!" bawled a group of young soldiers, throwing up their forage caps. They were unable to wait any longer. They were afraid that something might happen yet to deprive them of the grand adventure. They were ready to fight for the Fatherland and to die as heroes, if necessary, but there was one thing they were not willing to do: that was to return to everyday life, to the factory, to the office chair.

Papa gave Stephan money to buy a newspaper, and a moment later he came back waving one triumphantly. Georg slowly read the sensational telegram about the Russian frontier incident, while Paul merely gave a glance at the fat headlines. "If it's true . . ." he said, turning away. Elisabeth looked at him with amazement. Did he

really mean that such messages might be invented? Would the government allow papers to deceive people in this way? Was it not natural that Russia, where they still had pogroms, and where the Cossacks still dispersed the hungry masses with the naked sword, would be guilty of such cowardly atrocities?

The fact that Paul was going to war without even believing that there was an injustice to be righted made this last quarter of an hour they spent together almost unbearable. When he stepped into his carriage Elisabeth felt unable to control herself any longer. She clasped the window-frame with both hands. Through the moisture that made her eyes unsteady, she was able to see how Paul's eyes also slowly filled with tears. She had never seen him cry. His sister and Hilda were also crying, and from the half-dark of the compartment behind them Peter Althofer looked at her with sad and pitying gaze from his meditative and infinitely childlike eyes.

"Paul, come back! Come back, Paul! Do come back to me, Paul!" He nodded and clenched his teeth frantically in order not to give way, while Papa shook hands with him for a final good-bye. When the train began to move, Elisabeth felt herself taken by the shoulders. Papa pressed her protectingly against him. The platform was too full for her to run part of the way along the train. But Stephan drew her near him on a trolley, and over the heads of people she saw Paul's waving arm. Although he was not in uniform, a girl threw him a packet of cigarettes. He caught the packet and gave her a friendly smile. Then he tried to catch another glimpse of Elisabeth but he seemed unable to distinguish her among all the people who stood waving on the trolley. At the other end of the platform a train crowded with soldiers was preparing to leave, and a band played the national anthem. The crowd began to sing. Elisabeth shuddered. Leaning on her father's strong shoulder she looked up to the iron roof of the station that was buried in soot.

She allowed herself to be led outside as one who is in a dream. They passed along cattle trucks and luggage vans in which an Alpine regiment was heaped up. Through the open doors laughing heads were pressed; the men begged for a favour from the girls who were distributing cigarettes. Stephan read aloud the inscriptions that were chalked on the vans: "Free journey to Moscow! Bring your own insect powder!" Why did they require insect powder, he asked. Were there so many lice in Moscow? Georg walked to the cathedral with his children. Elisabeth was unable to understand the words the priest was addressing to the crowd. They were sounds that fell from the pulpit and meant nothing. All she could see was that train rolling away with Paul inside. The organ and the collective prayers somewhat restored her calm. The universal suffering around her reconciled her with her own suffering. She could not understand what was

happening to the world and to herself. But in this she was apparently not alone.

In the carriage on the way home Georg tried to read the rest of the paper. There were long descriptions of the delirious war enthusiasm in Vienna, Prague, and Budapest. There was also an impressive survey of the united forces of Austria and Germany. There were passages of invective to the address of Servia, Russia, and also of France. In bitter words Italy was reminded of its solemn duty as an ally. There were articles relating examples of heroism and patriotism in the monarchy. Stories of lame people who cursed their crutches, of children who wanted to form a regiment of their own under the command of a seventeen-year-old; there were old men who demanded to be given a uniform and a rifle.

Georg dropped the paper with a gesture of fatigue. Reading in this badly-sprung carriage was too tiring for the eyesight. He felt offended, moreover, by all this mendacious and rhetorical stuff and by this vile flattery of every crowd-instinct. The papers had been so brave for weeks ever since the murders at Sarajevo. At first they clamoured for war and now that at last the armies were marching towards the frontier, they prided themselves on the attitude they had adopted. Georg began to wonder whether it would not be a good thing to weed out these editorial offices and to find whether among all these bellicose people there was not some who could not be more usefully employed in Servia or in Galicia.

Perhaps it was necessary that such articles should be written. People in towns could not be satisfied with the knowledge that the armies were moving and doing their duty. Apparently they needed big words as well. Georg folded the paper with something like contempt. This gesture was going to become a habit of his; for months he would extend an avid hand towards the paper, only to drop it with disgust. He looked out of the carriage and imagined how a sheet like this might yet one of these days write in the same hollow patriotic style about Rudi's regiment if it distinguished itself and paid its heroism with . . . No, he must not think of these things. He felt that he ought to say something about Paul to Elisabeth. But he could not.

With a perception that seemed to function independently of his brain he took in the picture of these vast fields that were almost empty under the summer sky except for a few women and men working on them. Near the castle they met old Eisengruber who was walking to the field as in olden days, in order to direct the work himself, and to put his knotty old hands to the task. The carriage stopped and Eisengruber told them how he had seen off Toni at Seekirchen. His wife was terribly upset, but happily his elder daughter was coming home with her baby. This would bring a little variety at any rate.

The girl did not know what to do now that her husband had been called up. Here she could at least give some assistance.

"You might be able to make use of Stephan," said Georg, and turning towards the boy he said, "Wouldn't you like to?" Stephan had already jumped down from the seat. The old man put his hand on his shoulder and tried to make his face a little more friendly. "And has the young gentleman already left for Germany?" he asked with an awkward glance in the direction of Elisabeth.

"He must be near the frontier by now," said Georg, answering in his daughter's place.

"And did not Fraulein Angélique go with you?"

This question touched a chord in Georg. It reminded him of something unpleasant. What was it? He must have a talk with the girl! Why, she had not deigned to come down to breakfast when Paul was on the point of leaving. "My younger daughter did not come with us," he replied rather abruptly.

"But surely she went out to meet you?"

"That's the first I heard of it."

"But quite early this morning! You had hardly left. Toni asked her whether she'd care to drive to Seekirchen with us. But she said she was walking to meet you."

Elisabeth was thunderstruck. She looked slowly away in order not to meet the old man's eyes.

"Do *you* understand?" asked Georg, who was beginning to feel uncomfortable. She shook her head. He looked at her, but when he saw how pale she was he attributed it to her distress at parting with Paul. "Better drive on, Ignaz," he said. "We'll hear all about it when we are home." When they reached the courtyard Mariedl could only confirm Eisengruber's information. But there was something in her tone which Georg did not like. He looked at Mariedl's face, which was red and tear-stained because Ignaz would also have to leave, and then, driven by a sudden disquiet, he went upstairs. He found his wife and Frieda crying in each other's arms. Frieda tried to talk encouragingly to her, but when he entered the bedroom she pushed her aside and made an effort to sit up. What was the matter? Why did she rise like this? Did she have something to explain or to justify? How strange her eyes looked! "Where is Angélique?" he asked. Maria looked into his eyes, and in a dull voice, from which all life seemed to have gone, she replied: "She has gone!"

He still did not understand. "Gone . . .? What do you mean, gone? Where has she gone to?"

Maria repeated her words: "She has gone." He began to feel angry. He was angry because of the helplessness of these two women. Must he conclude that Angélique had run away from home? And what on earth was the reason of it? Was this another of those

unaccountable whims of this queer child? He found it difficult not to take hold of Maria's wrists. "But did you two simply let her go like this?" His fury suddenly turned towards Frieda who stood there looking at him with trembling lips.

"Frieda could not help it," Maria said hastily.

He was not in the mood to appreciate this generosity. "But has she at least told you where she was going to? Haven't you called for any one to hold her back? And now it's too late! She may be anywhere!"

He suddenly realized how completely powerless he was. He could say no more.

"Perhaps she'll come back of her own accord," murmured Maria almost inaudibly. And then she asked: "Where's the letter, Frieda?"

"Yes, she has left a letter behind," said Frieda, speaking with difficulty as she handed him an open envelope. He pulled it from her hand with a jerk, read a few sentences, and rolled the page into a ball with an angry gesture.

Maria, trembling like a reed, said: "After you all left she came to me with this letter. She said that she wanted to go, and that I had to give her money. She wanted money for her journey . . ."—"And you mean to say you gave it to her?"—"Yes, I had to. I had to, Georg. She told me that I had never been a mother to her. Never a mother to her . . . or to Elisabeth . . . or to Rudi. Not even to Stephan. Not even to little Stephan. . . ." Maria sank back into Frieda's arms. Frieda pressed herself against her, muttering little words of consolation. Georg looked on speechless at this scene. This was the moment he had always feared: the moment when his wife would go out of her mind. Mad, completely feeble-minded! First she allowed herself to be insulted by her heartless daughter, and then she handed her money to run away from her parents' home to a man whom she loved, according to her shameless confession, though she refused to give his name and address.

His fury had given way to a total amazement; he felt afraid at all the things that fate still seemed to hold in store for him. He stepped closer and tenderly placed his hand on the grey and tortured head of his wife. "But, Maria, did you believe the things she dared reproach you with?"

"I believed her because she was right," moaned Maria. "She told me that there was only one chance for me to make good towards her and that's why I gave her the money. Forgive me, Georg, oh, forgive me!"

Frieda stood there watching over her with a fixed expression in her eyes. She was ready to protect her even against him. Frieda had

been present and had not interfered. She approved of what Maria had done.

He turned away and rushed out of the room in a panic. Elisabeth! He must talk to Elisabeth. She was his last support. He knew she could tell him more. He knew now that she had told a lie in the carriage. When Eisengruber mentioned Angélique, Elisabeth understood at once what was the matter.

She was waiting for him in the passage, her big eyes looking into his own. He placed an unsteady hand on her shoulder. "Elisabeth, you need not hide anything from me. Angélique has gone and she has left a letter confessing that she is going to her lover. If you have any love for your parents, tell me where she has gone."

"What are you going to do if I tell you? Are you going to force her back?"

This question amazed him. But he realized that she was right. Angélique was no longer a child, although he had never ceased to treat her as one. A thousand different things rushed through his head at the same time. He felt as though this flight of Angélique's was an abdication for him.

"Do you want to defend her, by any chance?" he asked, bringing out his words with difficulty.

"Perhaps she could not do otherwise, Papa."

"Will you explain that to me?"

"Papa, try to put yourself in her place. The man is not an Austrian. The war is going to part her from him! She loves him, and that's all I know."

Georg felt the swollen veins beating in his temples. "Not an Austrian?" he asked. "And not a German either, apparently? But what is he then? A Russian?" He was growing frenzied. "A Russian! Why, my boy...!"

"He's a Frenchman, not a Russian!" Elisabeth said weakly. "I've met him! She made his acquaintance at a concert in Vienna."

Her father was no longer to be stopped. "A Frenchman! And you don't seem to realize that your fiancé is already on his way to France. . . ." Ah . . . he was thinking of Paul at last. Elisabeth looked down and bit her lips.

"Where was she going to meet him?" asked Georg with something gruff in his trembling voice.

She made no reply. It would not be fair. He made a gesture of helplessness.

"Why should you tell me!" he exclaimed. "I don't care, anyhow! Let her go to France if she wishes, and if she thinks she can justify it towards her brother. As far as I'm concerned, it's all over. She doesn't exist for me any longer. For me she is . . . dead . . .!"

He drew a deep breath and rushed away. He wanted air. Ignaz

always kept his master's horse saddled these days. He jumped into the saddle and rode away. He seemed already to have recovered his self-control, sitting in the saddle as straight as ever, but his eyes were cold and looked into the void with a meaningless stare. He saw no one, he heard no one, not even Stephan, who had run home to put on old clothes before he went to work, and asked him in passing whether Angélique had been found.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE LONELY CASTLE

THEY all waited for the first news with bated breath. The papers knew what their readers expected in these first days, and offered them a crop of victories. Every skirmish was a glorious battle. The capture of a little frontier hamlet in Poland, the name of which was totally unknown, suddenly filled the front page with headlines. A brief telegram with a few lines of scathing comment announced the news that Japan, desirous of capturing Germany's colonies, had joined the *Entente*. What new enemies would to-morrow bring? Anyhow, it hardly mattered now. The Central Powers were already on the safe road to victory. Germany was marching with flying banners into treacherous Belgium. Belgium had plotted with France and the fortresses of Liège were falling. Brussels was occupied, and the king had fled to Antwerp. Austria would have to put off her reckoning with Servia. Russia had first to be taught a lesson, but it was already being busily administered. While the German brother had the privilege of crushing the whole army of Samsonov near Tannenberg in East Prussia, the Russians were driven back in panic across the Polish plains. In Galicia the crack cavalry regiments of the Emperor had crossed the frontier as a glorious vanguard, faithful to their tradition.

The Major read this sentence over and over again. Apart from a hurried post card there was no news from Rudi. He was too busy looking for Cossacks. Who knows how far he and his comrades had already ventured into enemy territory? At night Georg lay awake and saw Rudi on a reconnoitring ride, always risking an ambush in the dark, and a desperate hand-to-hand battle. He saw him the victim of cowardly treason, defending himself against some hidden enemy, helpless through his inexperience.

Paul spent only a few hours in Munich. But in the train he wrote a long letter to Elisabeth. "I am being sent to the west; that means France, but otherwise we know nothing. I've met a few officers from my former Bavarian regiment and I'm glad we are travelling together. It's evening now and the whole train is singing. Sometimes we are kept at a standstill in the darkness because there are so many trains moving in the same direction and we have to wait for the all-clear signal. At every station people give us cigarettes and sweetmeats. Later, when I remember this war, I shall think of how it began with a taste of chocolate. I wish I knew what these naïve Bavarian peasant

boys imagine war is going to be like. I suppose they look upon it as a village fight in which you get cuts and black eyes, but all in the grand style with the Iron Cross as a reward instead of a night at the police station. They think that as soon as the French catch sight of a Bavarian peasant they'll start to run. There's a schoolmaster among them who is already teaching them French: 'Du vin, s'il vous plait, mademoiselle.' I have just talked to a former fellow student. He says that my father expected to see me appear before him in Munich in the white garb of repentance. Apparently he thought I would have to confess that Germany is in greater need of officers than of scholars. I almost went to see him, during the few hours I had left, but now I'm glad that I was strong enough to resist this impulse. Elisabeth, there is something I want to say to you. I find it impossible to write about it, but if you will think for a minute you will understand what is worrying me. Please let me know as soon as possible. We should not have allowed it to happen, Elisabeth, and yet I would not have done without it for anything in the world. It was so brave of you, and my memory of it is so lovely that I can hardly believe it. But now, Elisabeth, we are together for always. I know what I want to live for now, and why I am going to stand everything that is coming to me. I want to be here always to love you. Oh, I'll come back! The God in whom you have such a profound belief will not permit that we should not meet again! I kiss you and I take you in my arms."

Elisabeth read the letter until her tears blurred the lines. The envelope bore the postmark of Mayence. Where was Paul by now? As she lay lonely and wakeful in her bed at night, she sometimes forgot that he had gone and she felt his embrace once more. Then she woke with a start and felt a burning longing that was almost unbearable. She would have liked to call out his name, to get up and creep to the room, where Mariedl had made his bed as though he would be back in a few days.

At first she wrote to him every day, and, out of a sense of fairness, she also wrote each time to Rudi. They were letters on which the sole address was the number of a regiment and a battalion. Where was the field post going to deliver them? In what circumstances would they be received? She tried to suppress the frightening pictures that rose before her eyes. She prayed. She prayed with perseverance, pressing her fists into her eyes.

She was waiting in vain for news from Angélique. The town clerk of Seekirchen confessed to her one day that at the urgent request of her sister he had sent *poste restante* to Venice the papers she needed for getting married. The thought that Desmond had after all been in earnest reassured Elisabeth to a considerable extent. But at the same time it hurt her to think that Angélique had written to the town clerk and not to her. She would have settled everything for her

and then she could have written to show that she at any rate did not condemn her. Did Angélique not want to know how Mama took her flight? Did she not want to know about Rudi and about Paul? Did all this suddenly mean nothing to her? Papa never mentioned Angélique. Elisabeth no longer believed that this silence was due to anger or to obstinacy. There was no room in his heart and in his thoughts for the daughter who had passed over to the enemy. He seemed really to have forgotten her for ever. There was something appalling in the ease with which he had given her up. It was almost a justification of Angélique's action.

Georg thought of his son, and of no one and nothing else. Every morning he rode to Klagenfurt to read the latest telegrams. They were less encouraging than during the first weeks. The triumphant advance of the Germans appeared suddenly to have halted on the banks of the Marne. There were whispers of appalling sacrifices in human life. Only in the east had there been further successes for the German armies. Von Hindenburg, a retired officer of Georg's own age, who lived forgotten in a provincial town, suddenly drove a newly-formed Russian army into the Masurian lakes. But Rudi was not with him. The second battle of Lemberg was raging, and the communiqués admitted the fact that the troops of the monarchy had to give way. What did this mean? Georg often rode to town twice in one day. When he saw the women crowding with anxious eyes round the hoarding, while the children played soldiers with wooden rifles in the streets, he felt that he knew what Rudi was fighting for. He was fighting to protect his country and his people against aggression. One day he walked absent-mindedly with the crowd into the cathedral. There was a service, and the organ played. He had never realized so far that he had any faith left. But he felt that at this moment he was a believer like all those who were kneeling around him, praying for God's protection in favour of a son or a lover. He went home calmer and inwardly strengthened. But a few hours later anxiety was once more gnawing at his heart.

The oppression that hung over the castle almost stifled him. Maria glided through the house like a ghost. At other times she took excessive doses of sleeping draught and lay on her bed in a dazed condition. He would have liked to talk with her about Rudi, but he felt offended because her tortured mind had still room for thoughts about von Brandt, or even about Brigitte who had come to pour out her grief to her. He suspected that Maria might even mention a name which he never wanted to hear again in his house. Elisabeth also was impossible to talk with. He read about other girls who were proud that their fiancé was defending his country, but she seemed to feel anxiety and nothing else. She, the daughter and the sister of an officer! Whenever Georg came back from town he read in those big ques-

tioning eyes with which she looked at him that she was always prepared for the worst and this at once took away the courage he had just collected.

Each time he entered the farm he heard the same complaint from Eisengruber: he was unable to cope with his work with a mere handful of farm hands. And meanwhile his wife was crying all day for Toni. At Franz's house Brigitte had a similar story for him. She thanked God at any rate that her younger son was still too young to go to this dreadful war. Georg thought that he ought not to permit such talk on his estate. "I would thank God if my Stephan were old enough to stand by his brother's side," he said. Brigitte looked at him, startled. At first she did not even seem to understand him. Then she gave him a meaningless nod and turned away, ashamed to show her tears.

Every week new classes were called up. Older labourers received with amazement the news that the men of their year were to appear at the town hall. In their own time they had been trained with muzzle loaders and all they remembered was a few old-fashioned words of command. Now, and with that kind of training, they would have to go and fight. Ignaz had been called away long ago. An old coachman, who used to drive Dr. Prisswitz before motor cars came into the world, was looking after the horses. His name was Zacharias. He gladly admitted that the war had unexpectedly provided him with a good job and he hoped it wouldn't be over too soon. He didn't understand why Mariedl turned her back when she heard him speak like this. All the maids had been to see Ignaz off. They all gave him holy images and medals. But of course he could not take seriously even a war like this. He packed his zither and said he intended to play it to the Russians. They would all have to dance instead of fighting, and then the war would be over. He had only one uncomfortable moment, and that was when he kissed his little daughter Hanni good-bye. Mariedl was huddled dazed in her chair and as he looked at her big body he said that he would be back in time to hold his son over the baptismal fount. But he could not make her laugh. She clutched his hand and at last he had to free himself forcibly. In order to show how little he minded going he pressed a few shrieking girls against him as soon as he was out of Mariedl's sight. The little child was born, not three months later as it should have been, but after no more than a few weeks. It died in the Klagenfurt infirmary where Mariedl had been taken. She did not dare write the news to Ignaz and she asked Frieda to do it for her. She was on no account to say it would have been a boy this time.

In the first days of the war Dr. Prisswitz volunteered as a military doctor and was sent to a field dressing station. Nobody knew where

he was and he sent no news at all. Before he left he said to his old servant: "Johann, listen well to what I am going to tell you. I'll be back in a month's time, because that's what the war will last according to those who know. It would be very bad if the war lasted longer, because all my patients would be cured, and they would know it happened without my assistance. Keep the daily papers for me and put them in order. I'll be so busy out there cutting off arms and legs that there won't be any time for reading the papers. So when all this silly nonsense is over I'll give myself a rest and I'll read the news. It ought to be fun to see how many of their predictions will come true."

And so Johann tidily arranged the newspapers. Presently he tied them together in bundles of one month and put them in the cupboard. Later still, when everything was growing scarce, printing ink became so bad and had such an atrocious smell that Johann arranged a few shelves in the wine cellar where he put the papers safely away, because the whole house was beginning to smell of them. The wine itself remained beautifully undisturbed during those years. Moss grew on the bottles and eventually when Dr. Prisswitz did come back, it was a great surprise for him to find this lovely provision of which he had not thought throughout his four years' absence. He told Johann to burn at once all those dirty papers because he did not want to think of the war till his dying day. He told his surviving patients that the wine would have been even better if the papers had not been kept in the same cellar. The lies that were in them had poisoned the divine juice in the bottles. Perhaps, he said, some people did not taste it. But he did.

At the beginning Johann sometimes met the Major while he was on a visit to Klagenfurt and told him about his worries. He wondered whether he ought not to shut up the house and go and live with his unmarried sister. His master never wrote and he had to go every day to read the casualty list at the town hall in order to see whether the doctor's name was among them. He was not a great reader and had to spell out all the names beginning with a P. He would read: Prager, Prasser, Pruszek. But, the Lord be praised, the name Prisswitz never appeared.

Georg hoped that he might be spared one shock, that of seeing Rudi's name in the casualty list before he had received a telegram. Nevertheless he was unable to keep away from the notice boards. Pale and rigid, he scanned the list of names of these masses of young men, who were joined under the inscription: "Our fallen heroes," whether they lost their lives fighting or running away. Nearly all of them had been decorated; the authorities were generous with their bits of ribbon which might perhaps soften the grief of the survivors a little. As he read the long rows of names Georg sometimes shuddered

at the thought that so many of them were known to him. There were names of officers in his own regiment, sons and grandsons of the men he had known. He could guess their age from their rank. He could not connect any face with some of the names which he had probably only heard mentioned. But every fifth or tenth name was curiously familiar to him, and his first discovery was that the casualties were especially heavy among the cavalry. His own regiment distinguished itself quite early at Sandomierz. If this war was won it would be paid for with the blood of the cavalry.

He remembered having read many years ago in a technical military paper that the next war would mean the end of cavalry as a weapon of attack. The article was intelligently written and affected him rather painfully but he reflected that it was no business of his and that the supreme command would have to draw its own conclusions from theories like this. It might be true that machine guns were going to change a cavalry charge into mass suicide and in that case the mounted men ought to be reduced to a minimum and cavalry used for reconnoitring only. Unhappily others seemed to have felt like himself and could not give up such an ancient and glorious institution. Modern armaments meant that a banner which had become sacred through glorious centuries was being hauled down. How could one expect young noblemen to serve in the infantry? How could the chivalrous nature of the old Emperor have submitted to such a thing? What would have remained of a military parade if there had not been the famous cavalry regiments with their flying dolmans, their glittering helmets and lances, their horses . . . the whole suggestion of chivalry and glory? This new war was destroying all these great traditions. The first man who turned a barking machine gun on a charging squadron of cavalry and brought down hundreds of the noblest horses by pressing a button . . . this man was a coward.

At last news came from Rudi, and a week later there was another letter. Both were read and re-read until every one knew them by heart. The farm as well as the castle knew it at once when the postman brought one of these letters. The moment he handed it to the Major or to Elisabeth, who had looked out for the post throughout the morning, it seemed as though Rudi were still alive. His words reached them as full of vitality as when they were written.

He wrote gay messages as though this war were but a game like the manœuvres. They would all have liked him to write about his experiences in a more personal vein. His letters did not sound in the least like the letters from heroes that were regularly published in the papers. The words "God, Emperor, and Fatherland" that filled those letters never appeared in Rudi's. He asked for news from Paul and from his mother. He did not say a word about Angélique because Elisabeth had urgently requested him not to mention her, promising

that she would write as soon as there was news from her. He wrote much about his two horses who were heroically bearing the fatigues of war and were beginning to understand it. He mentioned in passing a few skirmishes with Cossacks and invariably he mentioned that one or two of his comrades had lost their horses on such occasions. There were bound to be casualties in such encounters, but Rudi only talked about the horses and expressed his sorrow at their suffering. "It's a pity and a shame about those splendid animals. They are not responsible for this war and yet they have to pay so heavily. Much has been said about the cavalry no longer being suited for modern warfare, and when one sees what happens to these defenceless animals one realizes the injustice we are doing to them. As far as I'm concerned you need not worry. I'm still alive and I look a picture of health, although I've not been out of my clothes for a long time and don't get anything as nice as the food we had at our beloved Czernowitz. Fancy that we used to complain about that town! You can tell Anna that at my first leave she has to give me something really choice just as she used to do when I came on leave from the cadet school."

Georg noticed how little the tone of these letters agreed with the picture of modern warfare he was beginning to form with the aid of newspaper reports. The endless casualty lists made one think that horses were not the only creatures that suffered. Was the truth in its full extent too dreadful for Rudi to mention. He began to have a strange suspicion: perhaps, out of regard for his grey hair, his son was trying to create the illusion that this was a campaign like that of 1866. But Georg did not want to be spared, he wanted to know the full truth. He tried to explain this to his boy but the letter was so difficult to write that he had to begin afresh several times. And then he wondered whether he was right. He had written in a restrained and dignified style, in order to hide his anxiety and his tenderness, as suited a father who was writing to a son who was away fighting for the Fatherland.

Rudi's reply arrived with unexpected speed. It was scribbled in haste and announced the death of Arnim. "I have just written to his parents. I saw him fall and I was able to get him to the field dressing station, but it was too late. When I write next I will try to give you some details but just now it's impossible for me. I am sure Elisabeth will write at once to Vienna. Arnim spoke so often about his mother and I dare not think how she will receive the news. You know how fond I've always been of him, and by his side I could go through anything. Now he is no longer there. The first moment I wished I had fallen instead of him. I don't say this in order to make you sad, but I realized that here he was worth much more for all of us than I am. His good humour in all circumstances did wonders for us.

Everybody liked him and it will be difficult to believe that he will not be in the saddle with us to-morrow."

Georg felt a chill in his heart. In order to do something he sat down and wrote to von Strada, who was probably serving his country at the ministry of war in Vienna. He asked Maria to add a word for Arnim's mother. He had to insist before she complied and to his horror he read these words at the bottom of his letter: "The same thing is in store for all of us. I have no hope that we shall ever see our boy again. It is all our own fault. We all bear the terrible guilt for which our children are now suffering." Yes, Maria's condition was gradually becoming hopeless. Georg himself no longer felt the strength to raise her out of her hypochondria. Even Frieda was losing the hold she had on her. She refused to see the doctor and only asked for sleeping draughts. Georg was convinced that Frieda gave her more than any doctor would have permitted. Maria's religious mania had returned. Georg let her go to the chapel as often as she liked, and he no longer carried her to bed in his arms when she had been there for hours.

His boy . . . his boy. . . . If only his boy could return to him! Provided he was not at this very moment dying in some field dressing station like Arnim! Like tens of thousands of others!

Even if Rudi had not suggested it Elisabeth would at once have written to Aunt Louisa. But she found the task very difficult, and the words she wrote seemed empty and meaningless. She had not had news from Paul for the last eleven days. Bright, light-hearted and sunny Arnim was dead. She tried to realize what this meant, but at once the other question she never cared to ask herself came uppermost in her mind again. Why was Paul not writing? Was he still alive?

She had hardly room in her thoughts for Angélique, who still did not send a word. How could she then make herself share the grief of Arnim's mother? Yes, she felt sorry, she would have liked to write to Aunt Louisa what she felt at the moment the news arrived. But she was unable to concentrate her attention on the matter. Her tortured thoughts seemed no longer to belong to her.

The papers announced heavy fighting in the west. The Germans had not been able to get beyond the Marne and the race towards the coast about which so much had been talked had apparently been won by the enemy. It could no longer be hoped that the French army would be encircled. There was desperate fighting for the extreme south-western corner of Belgium. A little river, the Yser, kept cropping up in the news. The last time Paul had written he said: "There are no longer forced marches. It seems as though the armies are no longer capable of moving one way or the other. We are digging ourselves in and the enemy whom we have not yet seen face to face

is doing the same. It is a strange business and I am afraid that in this manner it will last a long time. I dare no longer prophesy the time of my return. How differently the Greeks fought! They did not burrow into the earth! I am reading Homer at present like a priest who reads his breviary. It does away with the outside world, and I can imagine myself at Maria-Licht between two classes. I have been wondering whether I could have stood this war better if I had not met you. In certain respects it would have caused me less suffering, but my powers of resistance would have been less. I cling to the exquisite dream of our future and this gives me a strength I had never suspected within me. Your mere name, Elisabeth, brings a light in the midst of this great darkness. Do not worry if you happen not to hear from me for some time. There is always a possibility that communications are interrupted. I have a feeling that a hundred bullets could get through me without doing me harm, because I feel such a strong will to live and to come back to you, to work for you and for our future. . . ."

Paul's letters radiated strength. Each time one arrived it gave her new confidence. As there were difficulties in finding a teacher for Stephan she undertook with joy the task of directing his education. She began the work with much devotion. But when news from Paul ceased to arrive, Elisabeth noticed that she was only a weak woman. His living force must continue to feed her. And if she herself felt unable to concentrate upon the lesson, how could she expect Stephan to do it? If only there were news from Paul, one little word, a greeting on a field post card, that she might know that he was still alive. She was strong enough to wait for his return even if it had to be for months or longer. But she must have a little certainty!

Her father noticed her growing anxiety and tried to console her. He said that perhaps the field censor had stopped one or two of Paul's letters. Such a thing had happened to one or two people who complained too freely, and he had heard of letters made illegible for half or two-thirds of their length with black ink. How glad Elisabeth would have been to receive a letter in which everything except Paul's signature had been erased. But nothing came, absolutely nothing, and the postman seemed to have forgotten the way to Maria-Licht. Once only he called, and then it was with a letter from Rudi. Papa was happy for a moment, at any rate.

The envelope did not contain a letter from Rudi himself, but a short note from his colonel. He informed the ex-Major that his son had been mentioned for a medal for the heroism with which he had risked his life to carry his mortally wounded comrade von Strada to a field dressing station. It was an example of heroic friendship, said the colonel, that deserved not to be ignored. Almost at the same time

an illustrated weekly gave a picture of Rudi, together with those of another dozen or so more who had distinguished themselves in recent engagements. Under most of the photographs there was a cross, or at least the word wounded, and all these young faces had a tragic air. Only a few of them had brought off their heroic actions unscathed. Elisabeth stared at the little portrait flanked by death and horrible suffering. It was a little picture from the time Rudi was a cadet. She forgot he was no longer the boy he was then. It was as though with that triumphant little smile on his lips he could not possibly die. Perhaps his luck would hold! If only Paul's portrait could appear like this! . . . Sixteen days had now passed, seventeen days, eighteen days since his last letter had arrived. There seemed to be no hope left for her. She wandered aimlessly through the house, and often she had to sit down because black specks appeared before her eyes. It was like walking along the edge of a precipice. But every day she dispatched a letter to Paul, and it was as though her letter might somehow conjure him back from the unknown. She even decided to send him the weekly paper with Rudi's photo. Her father had ordered a dozen copies of it, and from one of them Stephan cut out the page with Rudi's portrait to place it on his bedroom wall. But as she wrapped up the little parcel and wrote Paul's address on it she suddenly had an awful thought: perhaps Paul had already met *Arnim* in another world and been told about Rudi's heroic action.

On that day again there was no letter. Nor on the following day. Nor on the day after. There was an echo-less silence that seemed to take away her breath. "Still nothing?" her father asked every morning, although he knew what the answer would be. And each time he put the question he tried to sound as though he were full of confidence. If there is nothing to-day, well, it means that you will have to wait till to-morrow. Oh, he had always been full of confidence as far as Paul was concerned. "Franz is just back from Seekirchen and tells me that Dixmude has fallen," he said. This good news seemed to have no effect on her, and he gave a shy glance at his daughter and put his hand on her shoulder with a soothing gesture: "It's a week since we've heard from Rudi, you know." One week, yes, but not three.

After a moment's hesitation he ordered the flag to be put out from the tower. He wanted to go to Klagenfurt, where the bells would be ringing and the children would have a half-holiday. There had not been much opportunity for celebrating victories since the relief of Przemyśl, which was once more being invested by the Russians. And now the red-white-red colours of the monarchy hung against a lifeless November sky, listless and tired, from the grey square tower of Maria-Licht. Just as Georg was about to mount his horse the postman, delayed by the mud and the puddles on the road, arrived

with two letters and some printed matter. One letter was from Rudi, the other, and also the printed matter, came from Althofer in Munich. Georg looked pensively at the address. With an unsteady hand he put Rudi's letter away into his pocket and walked upstairs to Elisabeth's room. He gathered all his courage and knocked at her door.

The letter from Munich was in itself a surprise, for Althofer had given no sign of life since his departure. His wife had written in his place to thank them for having dispatched the large canvas. He seemed unable to write letters himself. But this time he had brought himself to write. And while Elisabeth tore open the envelope with difficulty, she knew already how to explain the miracle. She felt her blood rushing away from her heart, and the words danced before her eyes. Georg had to catch her up in his arms. Frieda, who had heard that there were letters, was just looking in and he signalled to her to bring some water. He put down his child very gently, took up the letter and glanced at those first lines, which had had such deadly effect. Then he looked at Frieda. She questioned him with a glance as she spoke soft consoling words to the girl and dabbed her forehead with cold water.

Unable to speak, with his will paralysed, he stood looking on, and he did his utmost to share the misery he was witnessing. But at the same time he felt a dark, sinful joy. Arnim and Paul and thousands of others had fallen, but he had received another letter from his boy, a letter that was beginning to burn in his pocket. Rudi was alive! Rudi had been spared by fate, although it had struck so close at his side and killed his best friend. Georg had to leave the room in order to read his letter. He could not wait any longer. And he knew why he was going out: he had to tell Mariedl that Herr Paul was killed and that the flag had to be taken down. Mariedl turned round and ran away, hiding her face in her apron. She was thinking of her Ignaz, of course. Georg went on to Maria's room to bring her the news. She looked at him and did not show by a sound or by a movement that she had understood. But suddenly she rushed to the door and disappeared in the direction of Elisabeth's room.

Now his duties were performed, Elisabeth would not miss him while her mother and Frieda were with her, and he could withdraw into the library. Why had he still that guilty feeling? He tore open the envelope and read. Rudi was again writing as though he were away on manœuvres. He asked for cigarettes. His own horse was doing very well; but his second horse had to be left behind because it was ill with fatigue. Georg read the letter again. He could not believe that there was nothing else in it. Yes, he would send the cigarettes at once and write that von Brandt, after whom Rudi was again enquiring, had been killed.

In his hand there was still the little packet which he had forgotten to give to Elisabeth. After long hesitation he undid the string. He wanted to know what was in the parcel before handing it to Elisabeth, because this might not be the right moment. It was a charcoal sketch Althofer had once made of his brother-in-law. With a few rough lines he had caught von Brandt's personality with incredible skill and precision. Lost in meditation, Georg held the portrait before him and looked at it for a long while. The directness of its appeal fascinated and oppressed him. He suddenly felt a strange awe for this ridiculous painter, who possessed the power of making a dead man live. While he wrapped up the sheet with great care he wondered whether one day he might not be glad to possess such an image of his boy. Supposing this letter, in which Rudi refused as usual to tell the whole truth, were to be his last memento . . . !

Elisabeth bore her grief with courage. After a few days it seemed already to Georg as though the greatest danger had been overcome and as though she were determined to emulate the bravery so many women were displaying at the time. She resumed her duties towards her young brother. While Stephan meditated a mathematical problem or learnt by heart his first Latin verbs, he glanced up shyly at the pale but completely controlled face of his sister. Since Arnim had been killed, and Herr von Brandt also, this war was beginning to frighten him. He gradually realized that it was perhaps not altogether as he had imagined it. Sometimes he suddenly wondered: and Rudi . . . ? Never for one moment had he imagined that his brother would not come back in triumph. He would be full of stories of battles and cavalry charges, his arm would be in a sling and Elisabeth would have to nurse him. But now Stephan was beginning to believe that things would not happen like that.

More bad news arrived. The forester's son, Franzl, was reported missing. Brigitte ran in despair from one person to the other. She wanted to know the meaning of the word "missing." Did they not collect the dead after each battle? She would have understood if they told her that her son was dead. But this word "missing" sounded like a new and nameless horror. Could nobody explain it? Did it mean that her son had been so dreadfully maimed his comrades did not recognize him? Or had he been left behind, badly wounded, somewhere in the snow till the wolves tore him to pieces? Her husband said she was imagining things. The word "missing" could mean one thing only: Franzl had been made a prisoner by the Russians, and he would return at the end of the war. When he told her this Brigitte looked at him for a long while with a strange expression in her eyes and then suddenly she said in a very quiet voice: "But then I won't be there."

"Yes, you will still be there, because you can't leave me behind with the other children," said Franz. There was a threat in his tone which hurt her. He hastened to reassure her. "I'm fifty-five, you know. They won't call me up. Besides, I can't be spared here by the Baron."

Georg undertook to announce Paul's death to Graz and Vienna. A long letter from Louise von Strada arrived for Elisabeth: "Follow the example of our Vera, and devote yourself to nursing. After her brother was killed and her father asked to be sent to the front, Vera could no longer bear the thought of being useless to her country. Now she works close behind the front line, where there is more suffering to allay than anywhere else."

Aunt Louisa's advice was certainly well meant, but there was no need for Elisabeth to leave home in order to be useful. There was enough suffering to allay in this house. She went to talk to Brigitte; a wonderful repose emanated from her. When Elisabeth, who had been hit so dreadfully, told her that Franzl had really been made a prisoner by the Russians and would certainly return to her at the end of the war, Brigitte at last believed it. Elisabeth also talked to Magdalena Eisengruber and to Mariedl, who were unable to cope with their sorrow by themselves. Whatever she did or said her thoughts were with Paul. Now that the dreadful uncertainty had been removed, she was able to think of him undisturbed. She felt him nearer her than at any time since he had gone. It was as though he was continually by her side, seeing and hearing her. Once more she was able to collect her thoughts while teaching Stephan. She loved this task which she had taken over from Paul, and she used his books and his notes.

She felt only one grievous disappointment. It was not new, but in her sorrow it became more bitter as time went on. When Paul went away to Munich she gave no thought to the possible consequences of their night of love. The question only arose in her mind when he mentioned it in one of his letters. Since then she had thought much about it. She felt no fear whatever. It seemed logical to her that since she had been Paul's wife she must also become the mother of his child, and this idea, which filled her with a breathless emotion, grew into a feeling of happiness that became almost unbearable. Yes, she was ready to brave the disapproval of Papa and of the whole world. And then she discovered that her hope would remain unfulfilled. She was grievously disappointed that she could not fight for Paul and for his child; it seemed an injustice, nature had betrayed her by refusing motherhood to her. Now that Paul was dead she began to realize what a great and wonderful thing it would have been, if he had continued to live in her and had been born again from her womb. She no longer wished for the privilege of defending his honour in

the face of the world; she thought only of a playing child, that would have Paul's dark, serious eyes, his quiet laugh, and his name. Oh, that this child should never be born, that she would not be able to press it against her and to whisper into its ear: "Paul, my little Paul." This was her greatest sorrow, and no one would ever know of it. No one could ever be told.

Maria no longer left her room. The doctor was called in at last. He was an elderly man, whose one complaint was that just as he was going to give up his practice he had to enlarge it constantly in order to take over patients left behind by younger colleagues. He warned the Major that he might lose his wife suddenly one of these days. Her strength had gone and her mind no longer seemed clear. Georg nodded. The first thought that passed through his head was: if anything happens to Maria, Rudi must not be told, not, at any rate, while he is away all by himself. Even without the doctor's warning Georg could see that Maria was rapidly declining. He had almost no contact with her. Twice or thrice every day he went to her room, from habit and from a sense of duty, to enquire how she felt and whether he could do anything for her. She looked at him dreamily and without expression. Her thoughts seemed to be wandering far away. Did she even realize that he was there? When a letter came from Rudi his feelings still drove him first of all to her, but when, seated by the bed, he held her hand and read the letter aloud, he felt that little or nothing of its contents penetrated to her. "Are you glad there is another letter from Rudi?" On her lips appeared the smile that fascinated him ever since their first meeting. But perhaps her face merely reflected his own gladness. Perhaps she was glad out of obedience, to show her goodwill. The world in which he lived and in which Rudi was fighting for his Emperor and for his country seemed to be closed to her.

On one of the first days of December, while the snow was falling over the dark woods round Maria-Licht, the end came. It had been expected and during the last week Maria took nothing except the sleeping draughts which Frieda served out to her. She failed to recognize Father Aigner, and even Stephan complained that Mama looked at him so strangely and did not seem to recognize him. After this Elisabeth had to beg and entreat him to go into the room where the blinds were perpetually drawn. Maria, who used to be afraid of darkness and of the sounds of the night, was afraid of the light now. One day she whispered mysteriously that she could see better when all around her was dark. But now she had ceased to talk. It was as though she were listening. What were the voices she could hear?

Early one Sunday morning Aunt Frieda came to warn the family that the end was near. Georg and Elisabeth hastened to the sick-

room. It had been decided not to disturb Stephan unless Maria asked for him. She was panting feverishly. But the moans that came from her exhausted body were not due to the fear of death. It seemed rather as though she were crying out for her liberation, as though she were afraid that death was not yet going to take pity on her. She saw none of those who stood around her. She only saw her dead child to whom she would at last return after a long tiring journey: "Stephan! . . . Stephan! . . ."

At last her poor tortured heart ceased to beat and the peace for which she had longed all her life came to her. Georg slowly closed the eyes of his wife. "Do not cry for her," he said hoarsely to Elisabeth. "She is happy—look at her." He kissed his daughter, and also Frieda, who was vacantly staring at the dead woman, entirely at a loss because her task was over at last. But she was already remembering that the priest who had been fetched out of his bed to administer the last sacraments to Maria could not be allowed to go without a warm drink.

Apart from one farm labourer who had to look after the animals, every one followed the coffin. Stephan was quiet and dazed as he heard the service in the church and while he looked on at the burial. Half-hidden behind Elisabeth, he stared with great distressed eyes while the coffin in which they had placed Mama was lowered into the dark pit beside the snow-covered tombstone of his dead brother. He had never known this dead brother, but his name, which was also his own, had a mysterious air of familiarity on its little cross. While the mourners dispersed and the grave-diggers were still at work the snow began to fall once more and before dark all traces had been deleted from the churchyard. Quietly united under the silent white expanse, the dead were left to continue their eternal sleep undisturbed.

The death of his wife did not strike Georg as a loss. He had lost her years ago. Each time he had hoped to win her back he was disappointed, and it took him longer to recover. With the same punctuality with which he used to visit the sick-room he now went every few days to Seekirchen to place fresh flowers on the grave of his wife and also on that of his dead child. In his coat pocket he held Rudi's last letter. He always brought it with him, even though he was no longer able to read it aloud to her. Georg would not allow Rudi to hear of his mother's death. He told this to Otto and to Julia, who came for the funeral, and he wrote it to Ilonka, who was not well enough to come, and also to Louise von Strada. Elisabeth tried in vain to discover a way of letting Angélique know. Once or twice she had a feeling as though she ought to sit down and inform Paul. It was queer that a great event like her mother's death should happen without Paul being told. At night, when she was alone with him,

she whispered it into his ear: "Paul, Mama is dead." But she felt shy because he knew the meaning of the word, and she did not.

Otto and Julia were persuaded by Elisabeth to stay for a week. It helped Georg to discuss the war from every angle with his former comrade-at-arms, although he was irritated by Otto's confidence in the German ally. "Of course, our soldiers are good enough," said Otto, "and perhaps even better than the Germans, especially when one takes into consideration that Mohammedans from Bosnia have to fight for their Catholic Emperor and that Slavs have to fight Slavs who bear the same surnames. But in Germany the supreme command is better. That's where we are falling short."

"Would you care to bring it here, too, that German command?"

"It will come to that in the long run, when we get into real trouble. Think how Lemberg was relieved as soon as Hindenburg looked into the matter!"

"They're talking big enough as it is, those Germans. They'll soon imagine that they're winning the war by themselves."

"Isn't that better than that we should lose it together?" said Otto. "At Graz everybody is saying that half our higher command is intriguing against Conrad."

Georg had nothing to add. This eternal division was the curse of the monarchy with its many varied components. The stooping figure of the white Emperor was the one emblem that kept it all together. If he fell fraternal bickerings were bound to flare up into fratricidal struggles. And if by then the war was not over the empire would crumble to pieces. The Emperor was aware of the danger, and it was to this knowledge that he owed the strength needed to live beyond the Biblical span, seemingly impervious to the blows fate was inflicting on him.

An official came from Klagenfurt to find out how many draft and riding horses there were at Maria-Licht because the army was in urgent need of horses. Georg accompanied him to the stables and sent for Eisengruber. He asked the old man, distrustful and angry before anything was said, what was the minimum number of horses required for working the land. The farmer at once assured him that he had too few as it was. But the official remarked that it was the other way round: it had already been decided at Klagenfurt how many horses would be left for the work on the land. This irritated Georg: "In that case you need not have dragged me down to come and show the stables," he said. The young official, who wore thick glasses and was obviously unfit for any kind of service, looked awkward. "We have to go and look ourselves how many horses are in each stable," he said apologetically.

"What about my riding horses and the horses for my carriage?" asked Georg.

"I have been specially instructed to leave you a few horses for your own use. You are of course well known at Klagenfurt, Herr Baron. You can decide yourself which are the horses you can do without. And naturally you will be compensated for the horses you give up."

"Compensated?" roared Georg. "Didn't I understand that the horses were meant for army service? Do they imagine they're going to turn me into a war profiteer?"

"Certainly not, Herr Baron," said the official, stammering with confusion. "You can of course pay the proceeds into the fund for blinded soldiers, or . . ."

Georg's thoughts were already elsewhere. He hoped to keep two of his horses: his own and the young stallion Rudi liked to ride best. He did not wish to admit even to himself that he found it painful to give up the others.

When he went back upstairs to join Otto, who had not yet left, Otto told him: "Horses. I hear everywhere that the losses in horses are colossal."

Both of them thought of the same thing, but did not want to admit it. A few days earlier Georg had again read that the losses of the cavalry were disproportionately high, and when horses fell their riders were also bound to fall.

Aunt Frieda, who usually went her way modestly and unobserved, failed to find any occupation for herself now that Maria was dead. For the first time she appeared nervous and inclined to cry on the slightest provocation. It made no difference when Georg assured her that she could stay at the castle till the end of her days, and that she would never be in the way. She did not want to be tolerated, she was the kind of woman who had to be indispensable. But during the years she had been devoted to Maria, Elisabeth had gradually taken over the whole household. Now she managed it perfectly by herself.

Julia felt sorry for Frieda and asked her to accompany her to Graz for a few weeks. A change of environment would do her good. She had been through so much these last few months and her nerves required a rest. Frieda usually never thought of her own well-being, but this time she allowed herself to be persuaded with remarkable ease. She packed a modest suitcase and left the castle together with the von Sternecks, announcing that she would be back by New Year.

Elisabeth was not there when she left. Aunt Julia had compelled her to accept an invitation from Paul's sister and brother-in-law and to go to Munich for a few days. She returned on the evening of Aunt Frieda's departure, with a number of personal mementoes of Paul's, a few childhood photographs and early letters, all equally characteristic

of him. When her father met her at the train she knew at once that something had happened. She looked at him and at Stephan with fear in her eyes. "Is something the matter with Rudi?" she exclaimed.

"Don't be afraid," said Georg seizing her arm with an unusually nervous gesture. "He is wounded, but not seriously. He has been in hospital for a week and he has just written that he is getting on well and will come home for a few days at Christmas."

Elisabeth passed her hand over her eyes. Rudi was wounded. But she must not think of it, it was not dangerous. "So we're going to have him with us in two weeks' time. He'll be with us in a fortnight." She spoke mechanically. Then she began to sob and to laugh at the same time. "I can't believe it yet, Papa."

She could read in Georg's eyes that he was hardly able to believe it himself. Neither of them had dared entertain the hope that they would ever meet him again. In the carriage she clutched her father's shoulder and said: "If only Mama had been able to live for this." Did he understand what she was saying? He sighed and said: "Yes. . . . What a grand Christmas it is going to be this time."

It will be a Christmas without Paul, Elisabeth thought suddenly, but she realized that as far as her father was concerned nothing could disturb his happiness. After all, her grief for Paul was nobody's concern. She did not want to share it with any one. In Munich she had noticed how Paul's sister, of whom he had been so fond, was devoured by one fear only, that the medical boards, whose standard was growing less exacting every week, might yet pass her husband, whose health had so far kept him immune. And little Hilda was only worried about Rudi. She extorted a promise from Elisabeth that she would regularly send news about him. Althofer was the only one who appeared to sympathize with her. She noticed the shy look full of understanding which he gave her once or twice. But he was afraid of all that was sombre and sad. He was determined to escape from the man-made world by devoting himself entirely to his art. How strange it must seem to be the wife of a man whom one could never have entirely to oneself, whom one must always share with his art.

During their drive home Papa told her more about Rudi's wound. Stephan listened with rapture although he had heard the story several times and had repeated it in all its wealth of detail to Anna and to Magdalena Eisengruber. A fragment of a shell had penetrated under Rudi's left clavicle and had gone out again just above the shoulder-blade. Happily no bone had been touched. The flesh wound was bound to heal without difficulty owing to Rudi's healthy constitution. "A little lower and his heart would have been touched," said Stephan, delighted by the sensational aspect of the affair. Rudi was going to come back from the war with his arm in a sling, just as Stephan had always imagined.

Elisabeth had not yet got used to the idea. Papa called it a slight wound. Could he not feel in imagination the dreadful pain Rudi must have suffered? How could he, after months of fear on Rudi's behalf, speak about this wound in this hard military manner, as though it had been a mere scratch?

She did not know how Paul had died. Perhaps Althofer and his wife knew and refused to tell her. She thought it wiser not to ask them. She preferred to imagine that death had left him intact. He was still looking at her from the other world where she hoped one day to meet him, with solemn kindly eyes and the old familiar smile on his mouth.

As soon as she was home she wrote to Rudi. She promised to send cigarettes and books to him and to his comrades in the hospital at Dedreczen. She asked him to tell her whether he had suffered much pain and how long he had been left before the doctor could help him. She was unable to check her tears and her hand trembled as she wrote these questions. The tone of Rudi's letter puzzled her. "I was foolish enough to walk against a shell splinter," he wrote, "and instead of being punished for my clumsiness I am spoilt here by every one and I shall be allowed to go home." She read the letter several times but was unable to appreciate his humour. Was it funny then to be wounded? Did he imagine it would make her or Papa laugh? Why did he hide behind such words, which might have applied equally to Arnim, Gustav or Fritz?

They went to fetch Rudi in the large sleigh in which, with a little goodwill, there was room for four. Elisabeth was to break the news of Mama's death to him. They were pale with cold and emotion, as they waited on the platform at Klagenfurt while the train slowly came in. It carried a number of soldiers who came home for the Christmas days. Almost all of them owed this privilege to a wound. An officer was carried out of his compartment by two male nurses and placed in a little carriage that was waiting for him. His family crowded round him, greatly moved, and wondering what they could do to assist him. A kindly hand pulled up his blanket: he had lost both legs and was coming home for good. In the midst of all the misery around him he remained completely self-possessed. He nodded almost merrily at a couple of children, who might have been his own. On his chest a bright new medal shone. Almost everywhere on the platform people were in tears. They were tears of happiness, notwithstanding the distress for cruel wounds. Rudi appeared from the extreme end of the train. Stephan, who had pressed forward among the spectators, discovered him first and shouted his name with delight. Rudi laughed. He could not wave at them because his left arm was in a black sling and he carried his case in the other. Stephan

at once relieved him of the suitcase to which his sword was strapped.

Rudi looked rather pale but held himself splendidly. He did not ask: "Where is Mama?" Elisabeth kissed him and was so overcome that she forgot his wound. She relinquished her hold of him when she saw how he had to bite his lip.

"Oh, you are already wearing your medal," she said, looking up shyly at the metallic glitter on the cloth of his coat. They all walked together to the exit. Rudi had to salute right and left with his free hand: the station-master and many others recognized him and greeted him. The Major looked round with pride. Here he was, walking by the side of his son who had been decorated for bravery in face of the enemy.

Before they stepped into the sledge, and while Zaccharias was tying the suitcase to the back with the help of Stephan, Elisabeth put her hand on her brother's arm and looked at him through her tears. "Rudi, I must tell you something about Mama."

He looked at her in a way that made her realize at once that he knew. "I know. At least I thought it from your last few letters," he said. "It's true, isn't it? Mama is . . ." He would have liked entirely to control himself, but now he did not find the strength to finish his question.

Georg who was superintending the arrangements made for the suitcase, had not missed a word. He turned round and said: "We did not want to write it to you out there, my boy. For Mama it was the best way out." Rudi agreed. "It's only that I've still got to get used to it, Papa. I thought . . . but never mind. . . ." He turned away quickly. Georg looked helplessly at his daughter. Gently she took hold of Rudi's arm. "Rudi, to-morrow we'll go to her together." He understood the prayer in her eyes. She wanted him to control himself for the sake of Stephan. "Yes, little sister," he said, and then put his hand on Stephan's shoulder. "Let me have a good look at you, young fellow. What a lot you've grown during the last few months."

"He's only just thirteen," exclaimed Elisabeth. She did not want him to grow up. Stephan sat on the box with Zaccharias. He kept turning round in order to have a look at his brother. He wanted to hear everything about the war. Rudi promised to tell him when they were home, though there was really very little to tell. Meanwhile he looked at the snow-covered fields. How exquisite it was, and how unbelievable, to be able to return to this peaceful familiar world of his youth. Only, Mama would not be waiting for him at home, and Angélique also had gone.

When the sleigh passed the forester's house Franz and his wife came outside to greet Rudi. Brigitte took hold of his hand and looked at him with tears in her eyes. It seemed unbelievable to her that

any one could come home alive from this war. "Herr Rudi, have you heard about our Franzl? What do you think . . . when someone is missing . . . do they sometimes find them afterwards?"

"But of course," said her husband awkwardly, looking for confirmation to Rudi.

"Perhaps he's just a prisoner," suggested Rudi. "In that case he will be freed when all is over."

"When her own husband says so she won't believe him," Franz complained.

"But how long is this war still going to last, Herr Rudi?"

"Herr Rudi couldn't tell us. Do be reasonable, Brigitte."

"Nobody knows, Brigitte. But we all hope it won't be much longer."

"They're calling up men of fifty now," moaned Brigitte. She walked a few steps along with the sleigh. Then her husband seized her firmly by the shoulders and conducted her back home, where the children were looking through the window.

Old Anna had prepared a grand meal, and Father Aigner arrived to do honour to Rudi. A large Christmas tree stood in a corner of the dining-room. Elisabeth and Stephan lit the candles, whereupon the whole staff came up as usual to sing the hymn "Stille Nacht." The women cried and a few elderly men who had not been called away from Maria-Licht looked on as the candles were gradually swallowed up by the darkness. Father Aigner spoke a few words in a trembling voice, thanking heaven for Rudi's happy return, but he also mentioned the many dead and those who would have to celebrate this holy night in the trenches and under the open sky. Brigitte fell sobbing round her husband's neck. The children were all awkwardly waiting for the presents that were laid for them beneath the tree.

Father Aigner had been detained on his way to the castle because he had to call at a family where fatal news had just been received from the front. He could not go in a hurry simply telling them that he was expected at a festive evening. He was growing old and ill with sorrow. He had known all these people for a lifetime, all these brave honest boys who had fallen for their country during recent months. They all were his own children. He observed Rudi and came to the conclusion that he was no longer the same young Weygand who had gone away a few months ago. Father Aigner had already learned that no one passed unscathed through this dreadful war.

Georg tried to get his son to talk. He wanted him to give the company a detailed story of the way in which he had been wounded. He considered that this was Rudi's due, and was astonished that his son should try to pass it off with a joke. "I have hardly taken part in a real fight," he said. "We had occasionally to raid the Russians

at night, because they're so frightened of the dark. One need only look at the eyes of the prisoners to read the superstition in them. Their moustaches and beards are so impressive, and underneath their bearskins they look like devils. But their eyes are those of surprised children. Once we captured several without striking a blow. The men surrendered as soon as they saw us, and I believe not one of them was able to handle a gun. This was the only time war was really like what they taught us at the cadet school. One day we had to storm a bridge-head. That's when Arnim fell . . ." Rudi went on rapidly. "Otherwise it was all retreat, even when we thought we had the upper hand. In the morning an order came, at noon there was a counter order. We often had the impression that no one knew anything about the situation."

Father Aigner summarized his impression of Rudi's story: "The difference between this and former wars is that all the parties are fighting under the pressure of fate. What has still to be decided is whether we are all driven by fate, or whether the whole business is merely a misunderstanding! Perhaps the greatest blessing brought about by this war is that such a question should occur to us at all. We are beginning to discover that our enemies are human beings like ourselves, that they too are men who have been called away from their homes and from their farms, and who want a war as little as we do. One day this will result in our refusing to try and take the lives of others for a question that could easily be solved by some tribunal. But what a sea of misery must still be crossed before we get so far!"

Georg, however, did not want things to change. He was too old for this. The following morning he took his son to look at the large-scale map in his library. With the official communiqué in his hand he moved as usual a few of the little flags by a fraction of an inch, and it was just as though a grey staff officer and his adjutant were studying the situation at headquarters. Rudi, the weaker of the two, felt respect for this map and for the world of his father, and patiently listened to the theory of Hindenburg's offensive, which had nearly led to the capture of Warsaw. Georg was able to tell him many details that were unknown to him about the initial advance of the Austrian army under von Dankl and von Auffenberg towards Krasnik and Komarov. Rudi had had no time for newspapers.

That evening there were no visitors. They sat together by the fire as in olden times. Papa told the story of all that had happened here during the last few months, but he avoided the dangerous subject of Angélique. He told about Mama's death, about the departure of the Slovene labourers, and about all those who had left for the front. Rudi tried to keep his attention on what his father said. Why must his thoughts continually run to his comrades who were facing the enemy in the bitter cold of the Carpathians? It was strange that

every day of his leave he felt a greater longing to be with them, fighting and suffering, and helping to get the victory which would at last end this war. He found no rest at the castle. At the front a comfortable evening by the fireside would have appeared like a dream of bliss from which one never wanted to wake up. Now he was making the bitter discovery that all this was illusion. His real home was not here but beyond the mountains with his comrades.

When first Elisabeth sensed this growing restlessness she felt hurt. The Major also noticed it, but though his heart bled at the thought of the coming separation, he breathed with relief. He could not have borne the thought that his son was afraid of danger, however dreadful war might be nowadays. His Rudi preferred to be in the battle, he was a fighter, a man, unable to stay quietly here while his Fatherland was threatened by the enemy.

When the early January sun caused the snow to melt, Rudi went for a daily ride. He went with his father and Stephan, and sometimes also with Elisabeth. He tried to explain to her this sense of absolute union with the comrades by whose side one has fought, this horror of the slightest suspicion they might conceive that one wanted to escape the danger and the common sufferings. It looked as though, notwithstanding the early season, a great offensive was being prepared in the Carpathians. No man, no officer, could be spared for this extreme effort. Look, he was almost able to raise his left hand to his shoulder. His muscles were merely a little stiff. Exercise would soon remedy this.

What could Elisabeth have said? She knew that her brother was right. Being an officer's daughter she was even able to put herself in his place. At the same time no man could have understood what she felt when he talked of going away. He saw his comrades fighting and in his heart the reason why they were fighting did not matter. He wanted to prove himself a good comrade, to show that he had the courage of a man. Once he had done his duty as an officer he had no further responsibility. Perhaps he was also looking for a simple and honourable way out of the difficulties with which Vera would one day confront him. Perhaps a desire had gradually arisen in him to meet death with her image in his heart. But she, Elisabeth, would stay behind here with Papa and Stephan.

She no longer hoped for the miracle that would bring him back a second time. When he left for the first time he did not yet know what war meant. Together with his jubilant comrades he had rushed blindly into the great adventure. His first brief messages showed that his hesitations had been overcome by the ecstasy of his breathless gamble with death and victory. This time he went into it, like Paul, with his eyes wide open and with the same fatal shadow over him. It did not help Elisabeth to look the other way. She could read in his

eyes that he had seen the shadow which fate was already casting over him.

It was as though Rudi wanted to settle all his affairs before he left. He discussed Stephan with her. What would he study later? Stephan seemed to have a bent for technical matters. He made the most ingenious constructions with the English toy-box his father had given him last spring. Was it really only last spring? If ever this war came to an end, engineers and architects would be needed to reconstruct all that had been destroyed. One could always find someone to administer the estate at Maria-Licht and for the time being Papa was still there! And what, he asked, did Elisabeth intend to do with herself? Had she given any thought to her future? She repressed a feeling of weakness and proudly shook her head. At present her task was to continue Paul's work. But she knew why he asked her this question that hurt her so: he was looking beyond the present. She was not yet able to do this; she only knew, that, like Paul, Rudi also was going to escape from her. She realized how powerless she was and how completely her will-power had left her. She allowed the days of his leave to pass by, and she did not even count them. She received a shock when shortly before his departure he handed her a letter with Angélique's name on the envelope.

"If ever you get to know her address, send her this letter," he said, "or hand it to her if she returns home. One day she is bound to remember her home and to long for it just as I longed for it out there."

Elisabeth looked at him and nodded. Then she turned away with a quick movement and placed the letter in a drawer. This time Rudi was taking leave for ever. She knew it, he knew it, and he was almost in a hurry to be gone. And why not? Why draw out this leave-taking, when they had said everything there was to be said? Good-bye, Rudi! You know what you have been to me. I cannot hold you back. Take my love with you. Good-bye. . . .

It was in this condition of dull resignation, moving as in a dream, that she went to see him off with Papa and Stephan. Rudi himself had to think of his horse and to see that it was given a good box. This preoccupation eased the situation. Yes, the animal was well cared for. It had no inkling yet of what was waiting for it. Rudi's orderly, a smiling peasant, had travelled down to take charge of it. "I shall stay with it all the time, sir!" He had been received like a prince in the castle, and would have lost his heart to his young officer if this had not happened long ago already. "How glad they'll all be out there when you come back!" Stephan was still excited by all his brother's heroic deeds, of which he had got the complete story for the first time. He realized that it would be mainly due to his brother

that the war was going to be won. "When you come back, Rudi, will you tell me everything?"

"But, of course, Stephan, you're entitled to it!"

Georg behaved admirably. He looked into the face of his son when he shook hands with him and he stood up very straight, frantically biting his teeth together. It was only when Rudi had taken his place in his compartment that the Major consented to stand at ease. "Send me a word when you've arrived," he said, just as he used to say when Rudi went back to the cadet school after his vacation. Rudi obediently promised to write.

Elisabeth could not utter a word. She allowed her brother to kiss her pale cheeks and she put her arms round his neck. As she walked back with Papa and Stephan towards the carriage all she could see, as a last memory, was the moist reflection of the medal on Rudi's chest.

Once more brief notes arrived from Rudi at irregular intervals. His regiment was taking part in the big Carpathian offensive. Elisabeth found it difficult to believe that these post cards and letters came from Rudi. She reproached herself for her pusillanimity, because she always reflected that a message was no proof that he was still alive by the time it had arrived. Georg devoured the newspapers more passionately than ever. There was news of splendid successes. He hardly had the patience to move the little flags on his map. A wave of optimism ran through the whole country: the tenth Russian army had been destroyed by Hindenburg. Not even Italy's declaration of war, which seemed imminent, could discourage it. The ancient Italian enemy was not feared: he had been defeated too often in previous wars. And the Russian colossus was tottering. Another tenth army was crushed by the Germans in the forest of Augustov. At Gorlice Conrad avenged the fall of Przemyśl. The Russians were in flight and did not stop till they reached the San.

Rudi was not allowed to mention place names in his messages, but it was enough for Georg to know that his son took part in the great work of liberation. Przemyśl and Lemberg would be recaptured shortly and the whole of Galicia and Bukovina would be purged of enemies. East Prussia was already delivered and the Germans were still far away in France. Would the enemy not be ready to talk peace soon?

The Major wished there could be someone who shared this confidence of his. He had neither friends nor acquaintances in Klagenfurt. Father Aigner was almost superstitiously afraid of all these victories. He feared that they would merely make the enemy more determined. Georg thought the priest was pessimistic. In his thoughts he already saw Rudi coming back. He called Elisabeth to show her the map with the little flags. She looked at it and thought it hardly differed

from what it was before. Every fraction of an inch that had been recovered on the map represented death and woe on a large scale, a bloody tragedy which might by now have cost Rudi's life.

Yes, he was still writing. She told herself so every hour. He was still writing.

And then no more letters arrived. On a bright May morning, while the finches trilled and the skylarks shouted out their joy, while the perfume of the blossoms permeated the castle with the breath of spring, the postman brought a large linen envelope from the headquarters of Rudi's regiment. Georg opened it with white and slightly trembling hands. Out of it dropped Rudi's gold medal.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WORRIES ABOUT STEPHAN

MANY days passed before Georg could bring himself to believe that Rudi would never return, that he would never again shake the living hand of his boy, never hear his voice again. There might have been sombre forebodings deep in his heart, but he had always refused to acknowledge their existence. Even now he clung in obstinate and desperate resistance to the possibility that there might have been a cruel mistake. Rudi was not killed, but someone else whom they had taken for Rudi, because he happened to wear the same medal. It was only after many weeks passed without further information that Georg bowed his head and submitted to fate. He did not shut himself up in his room with his sorrow as many another man might have done. He walked round the castle, and rode the last saddle-horse that remained in the stable. But it was not he who sat there, straight and rigid in the saddle. He was only playing the part of Major von Weygand, the squire of Maria-Licht. Nobody really believed it.

He had a foolish notion that he was responsible for his son's early death and he condemned himself to bear his suffering without anybody's assistance. He refused to notice Elisabeth's concern for him and her longing to share his sorrow. He ignored Father Aigner's suggestion that he should call on him. He attended the memorial service in the parish church, pale as chalk, but with his head unbowed, looking at the catafalque which symbolized Rudi's coffin. The sunlight fell through the windows and played on his silvery hair brushed down with painful correctness. People accused him of pride because he would not betray his grief, while every one in the church had a sorrow of his own and only the common sharing of all sorrows could make them bearable. No, the Major refused to share his grief. And in doing so he merely followed the example of his daughter, who also refused to trouble any one with her sorrow about Paul's death. He forgot that there was a difference, that Rudi had belonged to both of them while Paul was hers alone. But in the last resort Georg's deliberate isolation was due to his sense of guilt. He felt guilty towards his daughter and guilty towards his son. And yet this war which had claimed Rudi as a victim was not his doing.

Whom did he try to deceive when the morning after the news of Rudi's death he went again to his map as usual to move the little flags according to the latest telegrams? Did it matter at all what happened at the fronts now that his son was no longer fighting? Rudi

slumbered somewhere beneath the earth, and did not notice whether friends or foes were charging across his grave. Perhaps Rudi was there, precisely where he moved a little flag!

After a week he gave up this pretence. The map was left untouched for many years, but it remained hanging there even when the war was over, because no one had the courage to remove it from his study. If one of the little flags dropped out when she dusted the place Mariedl put it back just anywhere.

Instead of gazing at the map Georg now stood for hours contemplating his son's medal. He had it framed and placed it over his desk with a few other mementoes, a drawing of the first Stephan, and a photograph of Maria as a girl. At last he recovered his self-possession sufficiently to ask Elisabeth whether she still had some of Rudi's earlier letters. He knew that they had been addressed to her and naturally she might not feel inclined to part with all of them. To his great joy she brought him the whole collection. They were letters from the cadet school and from the garrison, neatly arranged in order of date and tied together with ribbons. A mist rose before his eyes when he saw them. He thanked her with a slow nod and promised to return the letters after he had read them. But it was a long, long time before Elisabeth recovered them. She had to wait till after his death.

The reading material his daughter had provided caused him to neglect the newspaper. Although he was thunderstruck by Rudi's death, Stephan was still interested to know whether Przemyśl and Lemberg had been recovered once more. But the Major only read the letters of his dead son. They showed him how Rudi grew from a fifteen-year-old boy into a man. There was the episode of Arnim's duel. There were all the careful precautions not to upset Papa's old-fashioned prejudices. He wondered whether these precautions had also been paid for by Rudi's death. And then there were intimate confessions about Rudi's inner doubts. This was how Rudi wrote to his sister. Why had he never written to him in this vein? Did he not dare show himself to his father as he really was. Georg found letters in which the two exchanged views about Angélique. These two had already been worried about Angélique when he was full of care about Maria and merely supposed Angélique suffered from adolescent hysteria.

For the first time Georg began to wonder whether perhaps his behaviour towards his second daughter was entirely correct. No, no! She had run away from the parental home, and this was bad enough. But her guilt was increased because she had done it for the sake of a Frenchman, for an enemy! An enemy, Georg reflected. An enemy? But what if this enemy had been killed by now, like Rudi? Would he still be an enemy? But probably he had not fought for his country

at all. The mere fact that Angélique had written in September to the town clerk of Seekirchen proved sufficiently that her husband had been in no hurry to go to the front. If he had felt a good Frenchman, he would of course have refused to marry an Austrian. Georg had a feeling that Angélique had run away for a deserter. Then he was an enemy indeed! While his son had given his life for his country, his daughter was a deserter's wife! No, for her there was still no room in Georg's heart, notwithstanding all these letters of Rudi's which he was now reading for the first time. Angélique was dead for him, more so now that the war had taken his Rudi. She must never venture again into his presence. He knew what he owed to Rudi!

Thus Georg struggled with himself, with the desire to forgive that threatened to come over him and of which he found traces all round him. The whole of mankind appeared inclined to give way to this weakness. Not he! He was not going to be weak! He had grown to be strong, and he was going to remain faithful to himself at any price. At any price!

Frieda wrote an awkward letter after Rudi's death and promised to come home soon. But she did not come. Again and again she discovered that she could not yet be missed. At night, after Stephan had gone to bed, Elisabeth sat up with her father and when she could bear the silence no longer she sat down at the piano. She began to play once more. Georg gazed vaguely at the book he had taken from the shelf and listened, and for a moment it seemed to him that Maria was playing. It was just as during the first period of their marriage, in this same room. Then he had dreamt of a future that was full of exquisite promise.

He hoped that he would join her soon. He knew that nobody needed him here. Elisabeth was able to look after Stephan. She would grow into a second Frieda, a blessing to all those around her. His relation with Stephan had never been that of a father towards his son, but Elisabeth had been a mother to him. Georg considered that he had performed his duties on earth if he made sure that they would not be left behind in straitened circumstances. He paid a visit to his notary at Klagenfurt in order to add a few clauses to his will, so that there could be no possibility of trouble with the family in Vienna. He wanted to join Maria and his dead son with a quiet conscience when the time arrived.

Gradually the management of the whole castle passed into Elisabeth's hands. She continued the simple administration which Georg had introduced, she handled the housekeeping money and paid the wages. She went down every day to the kitchen to arrange the menu of the day. Old Anna Krone nowadays preferred to remain in her chair and to do light jobs while Mariedl did the cooking. As she grew older Anna developed a brighter conception of this painful

life. She often offended Mariedl by her unfounded optimism and her invariable good humour. Was Anna beginning to grow confused in the head? At the news of Rudi's death she cried bitterly, but the same evening she was making jokes which failed to amuse any one. In the course of time she became very talkative. The most important event of the last few years had been the engagement of Fräulein Elisabeth and the public compliment that had been paid to Anna for the tart she had baked. She told Mariedl long stories of her youth and tried to give a humorous twist to the saddest events. She liked to tell how her dear deceased husband, Krone, had gone to have a drink. He knew that wine would once be his undoing, but he was unable to leave it alone. Yes, said Mariedl, to herself. It was being whispered in the castle that Anna herself had developed a taste for a drink on the sly. And Mariedl could not imagine how any one could talk like this about a husband who had died in such a dreadful manner. She thought of her Ignaz far away at the front! Ignaz did not spoil with excess of news, but when he did write his letters contained matter for weeks of meditation. In his letters the war sounded so different from what she heard round her. Not a battle was fought in which Ignaz had not taken the most heroic part, although he seemed never to have been in danger. The enemy must be much less dangerous than she used to imagine. At least, wherever the cook Ignaz put up his field kitchen the Russians ran away at once. He hoped shortly to be sent to Italy in order to learn how to prepare macaroni dishes. Besides it was time he went to the Isonzo in order to bring some life to that front. He was doing very well, and the officers rewarded his excellent cooking with wine and cigarettes. Every night he played on his zither and thought of his dear little wife. All the enemy artillery were unable to interfere with his favourite pastime. One could always hear the shells coming from a distance and when they did he took good care to protect his zither by lying down on top of it. One day while they were preparing to storm Lemberg he was just tasting the soup when a bullet shot the spoon away from his mouth. He was keeping this spoon now as a souvenir for little Hanni. She would be able to show it later to her children in order to prove to them how their grandfather had escaped death during the war. His only wish was to be allowed a short leave in order to bring the spoon to Hanni and also to see to it that she should get a little brother!

Mariedl was not sure how much she ought to believe all these stories. She suspected that he merely wanted to console her for the death of their little baby. She read aloud to old Anna everything he wrote. She did not even leave out his ardent and rather outspoken declarations of love, although she sent little Hanni out of the kitchen and grew purple while she read these passages. She seemed to feel a need to prove to Anna how fond her husband was still of her, and she

naïvely concluded that he was being faithful to her. Anna did not doubt for a moment that he was still in love with her, but she expressed herself rather sceptically about his fidelity. Grabbing for the last few potatoes in a box full of parings she said: "It would be difficult for him to be otherwise in the front trenches! If the war comes unexpectedly to an end, and all these fellows rush home at the same time . . .! Why, they won't have enough clerks at the town hall to register all the little babies nine months later! I remember that my husband once went away for a fortnight with the previous Baron, and when he came back . . . well! well! well!

She had to laugh while she thought of it and she did not notice that tears were in Mariëd!l's eyes.

The post brought little that was agreeable and the time when Elisabeth looked longingly for news was past. But one day a letter arrived which was welcome; it was from Dr. Prisswitz, who congratulated her, a little late, upon her birthday. He was not very good at remembering birthdays in general, he wrote, but hers was easy to remember because it coincided with the Sarajevo murder. "I wonder whether by now this murder has been sufficiently punished?" he asked. When he volunteered for service at the beginning of the war he had asked to be sent away as far as possible, and after many wanderings he was now somewhere in Caucasia on the Armenian frontier. He went there hoping to find even more shortage of medical arrangements than in so-called civilized Europe, and his hope was fulfilled. He operated upon all kinds of people—Turks, Armenians, Kurds, Syrians, not to mention all the different varieties of Russians. Usually he only noticed where they came from when they began to yell. One had to work rather hurriedly and there was no time to notice the faces or what remained of people's uniforms. No anæsthetics were available, but the fellows one dealt with here allowed a leg to be amputated without giving as much as a groan. It is true that this was usually due to the fact that they had fainted. They kept as quiet as the expensive bodies in the anatomy rooms of a university. What a distant memory that was! Here one heard nothing from the outside world, nobody was interested in it. People fought for their private entertainment. One might hear something about the French or the English if they tried to force the Dardanelles, but once one heard that they had run away with bleeding heads one ceased to bother. If to-morrow the news arrived that the Germans had entered Paris nobody would become particularly excited. What mattered much more was that the Russians had been licked near Koprikoi. "If you saw me here, Elisabeth, you would certainly take me for a Turk or a Russian. I've allowed my beard to grow because otherwise none of these people will believe that I'm a doctor and that I have the right to

cut the bullets out of their bodies. There's a saying here: to fight and to get wounded doesn't matter, but then the German doctor comes! And the poor chaps are right. How long is all this still going to last? All this nice row has been going on for more than a year and it doesn't look as though any one was thinking yet of giving it up. Don't think that I'm talking about myself. For a would-be surgeon this is indeed a God-sent opportunity. I've been allowed to handle the lancet for a full year without anybody interfering. The dead keep discreetly silent about my excessively inspired operations at the beginning, about my clumsiness. But those who survive proclaim my glory throughout all these wild countries and believe for ever in modern surgery. Every day they bring cases to me which any surgical faculty would envy me. I photograph the most beautiful of them before I patch them up and restore them to their regiments. As a matter of fact they are far too precious to be exposed to danger once more." After these humorous descriptions the doctor asked many questions, in a tone that changed altogether and became almost tender. He wanted to know how Elisabeth was doing and all the others, he enquired after her parents, after Rudi and after Paul, and expressed the hope that she had no sad news to send him.

Elisabeth sat down to answer him at once. Not a question of his did she leave without reply. But he waited till her next birthday before he gave a further sign of life. This time his letter came from Persia, which had been turned into a war zone by the English and the Russians. He no longer wrote about operations and amputations, but he philosophized at length about the Koran, which he had read for the first time and in which he had discovered many valuable ideas, and in particular a considerable and commendable appreciation of the value of hygiene, as well as of the weaknesses and limitations of human nature. In the spring of 1917 Prisswitz ceased to receive casualties because the Russian revolution paralysed the front where he was working. He then felt a sudden nostalgia for Europe and succeeded in being sent back to civilization. He shaved off his wild beard and fell ill for the first time. Elisabeth's birthday was remembered this time in the military hospital of Trieste, where he was a patient himself. His neighbour turned out to be Ludwig Mayer, the red-haired son of the Klagenfurt apothecary, who asked him to send his greetings to Angélique. The young man had apparently kept an indelible impression of her and no one had yet told him that she had left Maria-Licht. Mayer would no doubt soon be allowed to go home. He had a wound, probably self-inflicted, in the hand; the wound had gone septic and his hand had to be amputated. He hoped to be able to resume his profession of a chemist, but there would be an end to his piano playing.

The wholesale murder continued from month to month and from

year to year and still the end was not in sight. In the west, where the decision was expected, the front line showed no movement at all. Regiments and divisions were decimated for the sake of a village or a hill, which a few days or a few weeks later was recaptured by the opponents.

On a dark November day in 1916 the old Emperor died in Vienna. It was as though he were breaking his word to live to the end of the war. The papers came out with wide black borders and gave a photograph of the coffin on their front pages. One could see the white-haired monarch lying very still with his face almost entirely hidden under the forbidding moustache and side whiskers, cold and aloof as he had been throughout his life. Perhaps nobody had ever liked him for himself, but only because he, the last of the great Hapsburgs, was the embodiment of a legend. The fearful succession of catastrophes that embittered his life made him an object of pity and awe. But in death his little round cheeks and his hairy nostrils gave him a repulsive look. Scores of candles flickered ghostlike around his bier; the tragic shadows of his deathbed stretched out across his whole country. All his peoples awaited breathlessly for what was to come. To the soldiers in the trenches his death seemed a desertion. The Emperor was dead—for whom were they fighting now? His grand-nephew was a young man without personality, well-intentioned but insignificant looking, and he could hardly be expected to lead the empire to victory. No one knew anything about him, except that his wife was an Italian who was supposed to favour the enemy. There was only one dull certainty: everything was over. One might continue to fight because one did not know what else to do, but nothing and no one on earth could save the country from ruin.

Once upon a time Georg von Weygand also expected that Francis-Joseph's death would be the end of everything, but now the news of it left him indifferent. Did he even take in what happened? Elisabeth ordered the flag to be put out at half-mast. The Major approved absent-mindedly. Otto wrote a letter expressing his grief, but he left it unanswered.

The townspeople went hungry and in the course of this third war-time winter men dropped down from exhaustion in the streets. It was bitterly cold and people were too much concerned with their own distress to give much thought to the suffering at the front. The best provisions were reserved for the men in the front line and sometimes this privilege was begrudged to them. In the end the men in the trenches took pity upon those who were left behind, and from the rest camps older men sent food to their wives and under-nourished children. During the summer officials appeared at Maria-Licht to requisition the harvest for the army. Old Eisengruber was so upset

that the maids prevented him with difficulty from fetching out his gun and shooting at the robbers who came to deprive him of the fruits of his care and his labour. Had those officials, he asked, laboured in the sweat of their brows trying to forget their sciatica as he had? They even refused to send him assistance for gathering in the harvest. They did nothing and then they came with their papers and demanded all he possessed. He would not give it! All those townspeople could all go and hang themselves! Why did they start this war? Now they took everything from him, his horses, his cattle, his grain, and even his only son!—"Yes, think of your son, Eisengruber. It's for his sake that we are here!"—"Then you'd better send him back to me here and I'll see to it myself that he gets enough to eat!"

Comparatively speaking they were still very well off at Maria-Licht. They had enough firewood and enough food. And Eisengruber was given the assistance for which he asked: half-grown boys came from town to help him with the ploughing and the harvesting. At the end of the summer they went back to school stronger and with red cheeks, but then they were sometimes called before the medical board that sent them to the front. Then, when more and more of the older hands were called up, he was sent Russian prisoners, who worked for their keep alone. This was the first time that the war meant profit to him, but he refused to admit it and he muttered that these Russians were no good at all. He said they were dirty and lazy, and that they pretended not to understand him merely in order to escape work. They might not speak a word of German, but they were jolly well able to tell the girls what they wanted and the girls were foolish enough to give it them! It is a fact that the farm girls felt sensuous curiosity as well as maternal pity for this little group of men so closely tied together by fate, who had been sent out in order to fight against Austria. There was a far-away look, a melancholy longing in these Slavonic eyes which exercised a fascination upon the girls. On summer evenings the Russian soul expressed itself in ecstatic songs and dances accompanied by wild clappings of hands, and then the girls forgot their friend who was fighting the Russians in Galicia or near Riga. All these women who had been left behind were devoured by pent-up desire. After the Russians had been sent away one of the maids discovered that her ready sympathy was not going to be without consequences and she fled to the town in order to hide her shame.

The forester Franz was mistaken when he expected not to be called up. He went away with heavy heart, and it was no consolation for Brigitte to be told that Franz would not be sent to the trenches. Older men, they said reassuringly to her, were only sent to the rear to take the place of the younger ones who were needed at the front.

At last destiny caught even Peter Althofer in Munich. After

innumerable medical examinations he was found fit to serve his country as a soldier. For the first time since their marriage his wife had to allow him to travel by himself and to fend entirely for himself. No doubt she realized that they would not make him fight, because any one could see at the first glance that he was not made for this. But she was sure he would fall ill at once and he would never be looked after as he ought to be in some field hospital. Under such dark auspices Peter Althofer went away with a few drawing books, some canvases and painting materials. Soon he sent his first sketches home, and his wife discovered to her amazement that he worked with the greatest inspiration and that he had never felt healthier than at the front in the Vosges. It was almost disappointing: her own health had been upset by the dreadful fears of the last few months. He wrote that his chiefs had let him off fatigue duties and combatant duties so that he could give his time to painting. He made portraits in the most extraordinary circumstances, and people were satisfied with the results, although his wife knew how little he cared for portrait painting. Once he offended a major who wanted his decorations to be shown more clearly on his portrait by saying: "I am a landscape painter and I can only paint you as a landscape." Peter Althofer was obviously cheerful and happy; he talked about the large canvases on which he wanted to start work, and of a commission from the *Munchener Illustrierte* for coloured drawings. The only thing he did not mention was that he missed his wife's devoted care. His wife, dreadfully lonely and distressed as a result, poured out her woes in a long intimate letter to Elisabeth.

One of the young labourers was invalided out of the army and offered his services at the farm. Eisengruber could hardly send him away, but asked angrily what he could do with a one-armed labourer who was not even good enough for fighting. Could a man like that handle a scythe, dig a spade into the ground or lift a bundle of hay? The man was allowed to help the maids at their work and this was all the more humiliating for him because he had always prided himself on being stronger than any of his fellows. But he resigned himself and gradually he became most skilful in using his stump. People were surprised at this because formerly his incompetence was as great as his strength. One day he was informed that he was entitled to be measured for an artificial arm and to be trained in the use of it. After this he was able to work like any one else on the farm. There had been no war for him. He could use his artificial arm with the fearsome-looking hook at the end of it with such skill that it acquired for him a moral leadership which would certainly never have been his share without the war. In the end he married the youngest and most attractive of the farm maids. She was madly in love with him after

he once threatened to beat her down with his iron hook if she ever ventured to look at a man with two healthy arms.

For months there was no news of Ignaz. At last the news came that his company had been made prisoners by the Russians. Of course the truth was not told, that the whole company, which had a number of Czech officers, had simply walked across to the enemy. It was whispered, however, that whole Czech regiments were going over to the enemy and fighting against their former comrades-in-arms.

Mariedl did not know whether to feel relieved or not from the dreadful fears she had suffered on her husband's behalf. She busied herself sending letters and parcels to Ignaz, and this was a very complicated business which took much time. Elisabeth had to help her fill in innumerable forms. There never was a reply. But Mariedl had an almost supernatural confidence that once he was away from the front, Ignaz would see to it that he kept alive, and would get hold of the things she sent him. She continued faithfully to dispatch long detailed letters in which she told him what happened from day to day.

Elisabeth also wrote an occasional letter to Toni because Magdalena Eisengruber's old fingers trembled so much nowadays that she could not hold a pen. Toni had been wounded in the face, but was better now and was doing service behind the lines. He showed himself very grateful for her assistance, wrote back extensively and sometimes his letters contained more questions addressed to her than to his parents. She in turn answered his questions, and his native refinement as well as the education he had acquired in town bridged the distance which might otherwise have existed between them. Whilst she read his letters to his mother she did not notice the curious way in which the old woman looked at her. Since this correspondence had started Magdalena seemed less worried about her son. She told Elisabeth with a strange smile that she felt now as though nothing more could happen to him. For, she said, she could not imagine that he would ever be rude enough to refuse to answer a letter from Fräulein Elisabeth. Magdalena grew calmer and she became more motherly and pensive. When she was alone with Elisabeth she liked to talk about Toni's early years and gradually these confidences acquired an intimate character which did not please Elisabeth altogether. She therefore showed herself a little less frequently at the farm and waited a little longer before she answered Toni's letters. When he wrote again after a somewhat longer lapse of time, she read between the lines his disappointment and she noticed that he withdrew himself proudly. His questions now were only addressed to his parents and to her he merely said that he had to apologize for troubling her and to thank her once more for her great friendliness. His letters grew scarcer.

She was sorry, of course, for the sake of his mother. She wondered

whether all these references to Toni's childhood had been so painful to her only because they always called up before her eyes that one dreadful memory of the time when he lifted the little body of the dead Stephan from among the stinging nettles in the dry moat and his reproachful look. Would she always have this sense of guilt in Toni's presence? Perhaps she had done him a wrong in the days when Paul went to talk to him almost every day, while she systematically refused to join in their friendship. With a sudden desire to atone for something she hastened to the farm. Magdalena laughed through her tears as she told her that there was a letter from Toni, who said that there was so little fighting on the Russian front that he was getting a few days' leave. He would be home the following Sunday!

An hour after his arrival Elisabeth met him. After Mass she rode to the farm together with her father and Stephan. She found Toni changed; he had grown older and there was something painful and rebellious in his face. He avoided looking straight at her when he greeted her. Perhaps his facial wound made him feel ill at ease. There was a scar on his forehead which ran right across his eyebrow. The eye appeared to have been saved by a miracle and was half-closed. But the other dark eye seemed all the brighter and all the more challenging. There was something aggressive about him. No, he was not afraid of seeing her again and of greeting her, but he seemed determined to preserve a distance. His mother felt it and it made her miserable at the very moment when tears of joy were rolling over her cheeks because of her son's return. "Can't you see, Elisabeth, that he has lost the habit of coming into contact with ladies?" she said. He heard her and looked away.

Elisabeth did her best to be entirely natural with him. She wondered why it seemed impossible. What had happened between them? A few days later Anna Krone told her that Toni had brought queer notions back from the front. He went about saying that the peoples themselves had not wanted this war and that they were not responsible for the misery under which the world was now groaning. He wanted ministers, generals and munitions manufacturers to be thrown into prison. The property of the rich was to be confiscated and shared out by the state according to justice and real merits. Nobody should suffer hunger and cold and instead of arms the soldiers should be given spades and pickaxes. There ought to be compulsory service not for murder, but for the construction of roomy dwellings for the people. No child ought to grow up in a damp and dark hovel surrounded by poverty and crime. It was said that old Eisengruber had grown so angry at all this that he told his son: "If those are the feelings with which you are coming home, I'd rather you went back to the front at once!"

Elisabeth listened with surprise to Anna's sensational story. Was this perhaps the explanation of Toni's aloofness? Did he consider that Papa and she shared the responsibility for the crucifixion of the world? Where did he, a farmer's son, get these modern and radical views? She had heard something about the revolutionary spirit that was infecting the soldiers on the eastern front. They had seen how the Russian soldiers threw down their rifles and went home singing and drunk with joy. Their country might be defeated, but it was at peace once more and the future looked far from threatening there. A new and wonderful light was shining over Russia. The victors on that front were packed like cattle in trucks and transported to Northern Italy, where they had to go on fighting.

After a stay of ten days Toni had to leave again. On the last evening he came to say good-bye. Elisabeth heard his voice in the library and rushed in to shake hands with him. For just one moment she had the impression that he was glad to see her. But when he left he thanked her for her good wishes in a manner that expressed bitter sarcasm.

She felt hurt: "I've heard already that you were not keen on going back," she said.

His face grew even darker. "And what else have they told about me?" he asked. "I would have been wiser if I had not opened my mouth at all. They're unable to understand me here."

"Maybe it's because no one has been treated badly enough here by us ever to get notions like yours," she said angrily. But at once she felt sorry for her lack of self-control.

He bent his head. "I admit that I would not have got those ideas if I had stayed here," he said. "But meanwhile I've seen more of the world. As long as I was in the front trenches I did not feel like this. We had time only for fighting there. But they say that it is the curse of service at the back that it leaves one time to think."

"Oh, as long as you admit yourself that thinking is not good for every one!"

For the first time he gave her a longer look. There was something self-possessed and contemptuous about him. "What you mean is that for a fellow like me the trenches are the best place. That happens to be my father's sentiment also. Don't you worry: I hope to be back there soon. But maybe I shall be there in order to fight with my comrades for another kind of victory than the one expected from us." He seemed to consider that this leave-taking had now lasted long enough, and with a final formal greeting he went away. Georg looked at his daughter with vague suspicion and said: "What was that?" She shrugged her shoulders, still agitated and failing to understand how she could have been so hard to Toni.

Papa did not ask again. He had noticed that the son of his farmer

was rebellious and unpleasant just as on a previous occasion when von Brandt had also been there. But what did he care. . . . He was no longer able to keep his thoughts for a long time upon anything that did not interest him very much. Presently he intended to go round with his new forester, who was a war invalid. This morning the new man had told him of battles in Galicia and in the northern Carpathians. It turned out that at the spring offensive of 1915 his regiment fought almost shoulder to shoulder with Rudi's! He now wanted to ask him a few more questions.

This summer Stephan had reached the age of sixteen and if the war went on much longer he too . . . But Elisabeth could not believe this. The country groaned with exhaustion and since the death of the old Emperor the whole sanguinary struggle seemed to have lost all significance. Everywhere disruptive forces were at work. Russia had been overthrown, the great victory of the Isonzo revived the spirit of union only for a short moment and now everything was quiet once more. In Flanders desperate struggles were fought, but their only result was the creation of vast new war cemeteries. All that this showed was the inexhaustible strength and energy of the Germans, who, hungry and ill-clad, resisted the whole of Europe. But America was shipping tens of thousands of its young men. They were still strong and did not know anything about exhaustion or lack of food. England had discovered a new and dreadful weapon, its tanks, against which at the beginning no resistance seemed possible. No, the superiority of the enemy was too great; Germany and the monarchy would never be able to win this fight.

Stephan was no longer talking about volunteering for the army, and he worried Elisabeth in other ways. He did not trust her, and to him she was merely an elder sister and not a mother. He noticed with what difficulty she assimilated the material she afterwards tried to teach him. He caught her out in slight mistakes and began to be opinionated and rebellious. He wanted at all costs to be sent to the academy at Klagenfurt and said that he was perfectly willing to do the journey every morning and every evening on his bicycle.

Elisabeth was distressed and felt unable to cope with him. Did the boy not realize that he was shattering her last illusion? Apart from being left alone the whole day with Papa; sending him away was like abdicating. She knew that she was failing, that she was unable to keep him interested in her teaching. When Paul used to teach them one felt all the time that there was so much behind what he told them and a few words of his suggested wide perspectives beyond the little patch he opened to them for the time being. Elisabeth was still a learner, she led her pupil by a few steps only. She begged Stephan to trust her at any rate until he had taken his matriculation at

Klagenfurt. Then he could go to Vienna and begin his real studies.

But Stephan was too impatient for adventure; he did not want to wait so long. During this summer boys had been helping once more on the farm. Elisabeth had encouraged Stephan to establish contacts with these boys who were of his own age and at his own level of development. She invited them all to the castle and treated them to lemonade and pastries. They talked to Stephan about their school and said that he ought to join them after the vacation.

Could she refuse this? She discussed the matter with Papa and it was at last decided to let him go. But then she became afraid that he would meet with an accident in the town or whilst cycling home at night. If it had been Rudi she would not have been so frightened. Her unreasonable anxiety about Stephan was partly due to general nervousness resulting from all the horrible shocks she had had, but it was also a remainder of the morbid fears Mama used to feel about him and which she had communicated to every member of the family. And then there was yet another reason for worrying. These town boys were in certain respects more grown-up than Stephan, who had remained very innocent. They taught him many things, and Elisabeth noticed that his attitude towards her had changed. He developed a self-conscious sense of shame. Formerly he did not even shut the door between his room and hers while he was bathing. He often asked her to help him scrub his back. Now he thought it necessary to lock the door between their rooms. And she also suspected that the other boys were lending him books which he did not dare show her.

Afterwards she discovered that many things that could not be tolerated had taken place on the farm that summer. The maids were responsible. They had fooled about with the adolescents and made them lose their heads. In the end the girls forgot that it was a game and one of them was crying bitter tears about her sixteen or seventeen-year-old lover who was still on the benches of the Klagenfurt gymnasium translating Horace and trying to handle his table of logarithms. And Brigitte came to Elisabeth to tell her that she had just discovered that her elder daughter, Trudchen, had crept out of bed during the summer on several occasions and gone to the farm to meet the boys. The child was only just fourteen and Brigitte had never thought of taking special precautions about her because she was always thinking of her husband and of her two boys.

Elisabeth felt something like contempt for this mother who needlessly published the secret of her child. She told Brigitte that she deserved her punishment for bestowing so much grief upon her husband and her sons while there still were three children at home who needed all her care and her attention. Elisabeth's reproach seemed to impress Brigitte. She sniffed nervously and said: "Yes, I dare say

you are right. I have beaten her this morning. I lost my head entirely when I found out the whole truth. I could have killed her. Of course I'm not without responsibility myself. . . ."

Elisabeth turned away. How she would have loved to have a child of her own to look after so that she might forget her sorrow. "Oh, you ungrateful creature," she thought as Brigitte walked away dabbing her eyes with her apron.

One morning Elisabeth went to see the rector of the gymnasium at Klagenfurt. She found him rather sceptical about the knowledge which Stephan could have acquired under her guidance. But after a few weeks she had the satisfaction of hearing that Stephan turned out to be one of the best pupils in the class where he had been placed. The rector was honest enough to admit his mistake and to write her a letter of congratulation. The school immediately brought about a noticeable and rather surprising change in Stephan. He became much more independent. He spoke with little respect about his masters, whose nicknames he had already learned from his friends before going to school. He talked excitedly about the record speed in which he cycled from Maria-Licht to Klagenfurt and back. He bragged, a characteristic which Elisabeth had never observed in Rudi. She was rather inclined to admire her younger brother, as she used to admire her elder. And it gave her an uncomfortable feeling, therefore, to notice that in the course of telling these excited stories with which he came home he never looked her straight in the eyes.

He also asked to be allowed to go to dancing lessons with all the other boys. They always were held on Saturday evenings. He would, therefore, have to stay at Klagenfurt after school, but this presented no difficulty because he had been invited to dine and even to spend the night at the house of his class friend, Fritz Klaus. Herr Klaus was a small banker, and Elisabeth realized that she was bound now to go and make his acquaintance and that of his wife in order to show her appreciation of their kindness. There were two girls in the home, one of fifteen and one of eleven, who also went to the dancing lessons. Frau Klaus offered to keep Stephan as her guest on the evenings when snow or bad weather made it difficult for him to return on his bicycle to Maria-Licht. The boy was popular in her house and the invitation was kindly meant. It annoyed Elisabeth that she found it so difficult to make her acceptance cordial. She had to admit to herself that she was altogether favourably impressed by this conventional middle-class household, and it was possible that her reluctance was only due to the greater solitude it would mean for her.

She hoped that Stephan would at any rate let her help him every day with his homework. At the beginning he allowed it, but soon he tried to make her believe that he had no homework. Apparently

he considered it beneath his dignity to work under her supervision. He was very quick and she suspected that he merely looked through his lessons just before class time, and forgot them again as soon as he had recited them. If this suspicion were justified, she felt that things would go wrong with him in the long run.

She also tried to repay the Klaus family for the hospitality they gave to Stephan. There was shortage of everything in the town, and the banker's wife received Elisabeth's gifts with tears of gratitude. Soon she even expressed one or two guarded requests. Each time she went to town Elisabeth felt ashamed at the relative abundance that still reigned at Maria-Licht. She invited the three Klaus children to come and spend the Christmas vacation with her, and the invitation was enthusiastically accepted. This endless sad and dark winter afforded Elisabeth her first opportunity for thinking about herself and about her future. Ever since Paul's death she had been afraid to do so. She clung to Stephan, and tried to forget that one day he too would slip away from her. Now this moment had arrived. The boy had been under her guardianship long enough, and it was natural that he should wish to be free. It was only by letting him have his way that she might hope at least to keep his affection.

After Toni went back to the army a crisis arose on the farm. The visit from his son seemed to have thoroughly upset old Eisengruber. He seemed to worry about the work, and the maids and the few labourers who remained began to feel the lack of guidance. The old man had kept the reins in hand with rare energy as long as he had hopes that his son would come back from this accursed war and take over the task from him. But now the boy had been home without displaying the slightest interest in the farm and without even noticing the superhuman efforts his father was making for his sake. Toni sat there in silence, and if he opened his mouth at all it was to say strange rebellious things that went straight against the feelings of the old man. His mind lost all elasticity and his son's remarks infuriated him. Why had he kept going for three years and struggled against his increasing tiredness? Why had he tortured his old stiff joints and worked like a cart-horse? If only he had thrown up the sponge right at the beginning there would have been less food at the front. Now he was partly responsible for the continuation of the war. But the war was not the only thing that had stolen his son from him. He had never liked this notion of studying at Klagenfurt. Magdalena, ambitious like all townsfolk, had wanted it. Now she had her learned son, and the parents counted for nothing. Throughout this winter the old man worried his wife with these bitter reproaches. She did not dare reply, and she wilted under his angry scorn.

"I'm chucking it!" he declared more than once, and Elisabeth, who had heard of it, wondered how things would go if he went. Her father did not seem to notice that anything was wrong on the farm. The Major was losing interest, like the disappointed old farmer, and instead of riding along the fields he went for endless discussions with the new forester, Rudinger. They went over the winter offensive of 1914-15 in the Carpathians. He even called him into his study and showed him the photograph and the framed medal of Rudi.

Sometimes Elisabeth looked half-afraid and half-annoyed at her father. Why did he continue to walk so straight, with the air of authority, when he was inwardly broken? Why was his appearance so misleading? He created the impression that one could still rely upon him and he demanded implacably that Elisabeth should submit to his authority. At table he sometimes gave solemn reports of his conversations with the forester, without noticing that he was continually repeating himself. The cripple forester became a prophet whose every word commanded implicit faith. He proclaimed the man's ideas as his own. One day he made the effort of writing a letter to Otto. But the letter was merely a rehash of the opinions of the forester, Rudinger.

Elisabeth did not, of course, resent the fact that her father was growing old. Only he should have admitted it and handed over the management of affairs to her. But he insisted that he was still master and that his will must prevail. After much hesitation she told him at last that she was worried about Eisengruber, and to her surprise he received the information with unconcealed satisfaction. "All right, if he does not feel like going on with it, he has only to tell me. I know someone who will be delighted to take over from him and who will run things much better!" Needless to say he was thinking of his friend Rudinger. And now he seemed determined to get the whole business over at once. Elisabeth tried in vain to make him behave kindly to Eisengruber, because of the old man's many years of faithful service. She felt an intuitive aversion for the new man who was so familiar with her father, but always carefully avoided her. She was certain that the matter of the farm had already been discussed between them.

She foresaw great difficulties, difficulties that would continue to increase, and of which this business about the farm was only one. She feared that her father was on the point of committing a mistake for which she would have to bear the consequences at a later date. But there was no one to support her. Often her distress was such that she wandered through the big empty house, wondering what all these rooms were waiting for? Mama, Paul and Rudi would never come back. And Angélique? One day Elisabeth stood before her bookshelf and, with a lump in her throat, went through her old exercise books.

She found one in which her sister used to copy poems and from which she sometimes read aloud in an excited voice, her eyes dilated with ecstasy. Now these lines marked a period that had gone, and life lay before Elisabeth like an abyss full of grief. She swayed on her feet and hastily closed her exercise book. She did not want to be weak. But why? Why need she be strong? Who was there to demand her strength? Stephan?

She ventured into Paul's room. If she had to pass it she walked very quickly and with beating heart. It was only at night, in bed, that she called him to her assistance. A memory had stayed in her subconscious mind and was acquiring an ever-growing significance. Almost every night she dreamt of the skating excursion on which she had once been with Paul. She remembered how they glided side by side in the half-light of the winter afternoon, their hands joined for the first time. And now she still glided across the wide lake that seemed to have no shores, through the wintry silence which had become the silence of death, and through it she could hear the rhythm of her own breath and the song of their skates. It was dark and cold around her and in her anxiety she pressed Paul's warm hands. He never let go of her and he continued to guide her at a strong rhythmic pace. But whither?

That Christmas the castle sounded once more to the voice of many children. Anna grew quite excited in her kitchen and told Mariendl of former days when the Weygand children called on her for sweetmeats. Elisabeth was glad to have work to do but she felt sorrier every day about Stephan's great friendship with Fritz. Joined to a certain kind-natured protectiveness, this boy possessed all the painful characteristics of the perfect bourgeois and Philistine. He proclaimed already the calculating morality of the future business man. Elisabeth would have been the last to pride herself consciously on her noble birth, but she was shocked to see how little able Stephan was to preserve his natural domination of Fritz, and how, in his blind admiration, he even tried to copy Fritz's mannerisms. Fritz was, of course, aware of this and treated Stephan accordingly. The first evening he felt a little uncertain in this large castle and in the entirely novel environment. But with his quick intuition he discovered that Stephan's severe-looking father bothered about nothing. After this discovery Fritz did everything he liked, even when after some hesitation Stephan told him that a thing was really forbidden. Fritz sat down uninvited at the keyboard, tried to play popular tunes with more bravura than sense of harmony, and sang at the top of his voice. Stephan knew that the piano had never been used for this kind of barbaric amusement, but he watched his friend and laughed approvingly. Fritz's singing also brought in his two sisters and the son of Brigitte.

Elisabeth realized why Stephan behaved as he did. He had always

been so carefully guarded and restricted in many ways, that what he admired most was his companion's self-confidence and his heroic unconcern. Rudi also had this lack of confidence and had also found a friend with characteristics that were the opposite of his own. But what a difference between Arnim and this Fritz Klaus! Though she tried to avoid it, Elisabeth was not always as friendly to him as she wished to be. She could only hope that he would not notice it. She did not very much like the elder girl, Sophie, either. Sophie played a primitive coquettish game with Stephan, whose dark hair that fell across his forehead fired her imagination. She was attracted by his aristocratic hands and his large open eyes. The girl was far from pretty but she tried to make herself interesting by teasing him continually in a somewhat heavy manner. Sometimes she even tried to humiliate him. But Elisabeth also noticed with a certain amount of satisfaction that, at present at any rate, she was not very successful. It was only the brother who fascinated Stephan and the brother expressed himself in the most contemptuous terms about girls in general and about his own sisters in particular, which caused much irritation and resentment on the part of Sophie.

The end of the Christmas holidays came as a great relief to Elisabeth. For the first time perhaps she enjoyed the silence in the castle. She often puzzled her brains to find an adequate method for keeping Stephan away from the Klaus family during this winter. Once when she was alone with him she ventured to express a slightly jocular criticism of his friendship, but he replied at once with extreme indignation and angrily defended his friend. Fritz was his only friend, the only boy who wanted to have anything to do with him.

"What do you say!" she asked, profoundly hurt. "The only one who is willing to have anything to do with you?"

Stephan felt that he had said too much. "Well, what I mean to say is . . . I'm not from town like the others, you see . . . I don't belong."

"If by any chance it's a kindness on the part of Fritz to be friends with you, I shouldn't care much for it."

But then Stephan had not his sister's pride. He had been humiliated as a child by not being granted the most elementary freedom. He had always been treated as though he were other than he really was.

"And then? I wouldn't have any one left!" he said in a tone that was hostile because he felt so helpless.

"I should consider that better than to beg for friendship," she answered rather sharply.

Afterward she felt sorry she had spoken these words. Stephan had been humiliated so often and now she had heaped the coal upon his head. What would be the end of it all? Stephan was entirely adopting the ideas of his comrade. Once he shocked her by declaring in an indifferent tone: "If they call me up for military service I shall shoot

myself through the hand on the very first day I get to the front, just as the son of the chemist Mayer did. Then I won't be bothered any more."

"Do you realize that your father was an officer and that your brother has given his life for his country?" she asked, suppressing her own feelings of war weariness.

He had to gather all his courage before, looking away from her, he replied: "That's just why."

She looked at him in amazement. She trembled. She almost felt a certain repulsion for her younger brother who refused to give his life for a lost cause and a disappearing ideal. And yet his young life seemed to her more valuable than her own. While she turned away in silence and left the room she realized that all she did was merely to add a further humiliation to all those that had already been inflicted upon him.

She began to get the impression that if he continually alleged himself to have less distinction than he really possessed he did it in order to challenge her. This at any rate was good because it was pride, however distorted.

"Don't imagine that I think I'm something better than Fritz," he said.

"All I want is that you should remain yourself," she replied, and suddenly she felt how unreasonable such a desire was.

He found no reply and looked dreamily into the empty space.

In the spring Brigitte's second son Hansl was sent home. His lungs had been seriously damaged in a gas attack and he had been declared unfit for further service. His mother was almost delirious with joy. At first she didn't even notice how he panted at the slightest effort and how strange his eyes looked in his emaciated face. "I'll feed him up and I'll get him just as strong as he was before," she said with blind optimism. She even confided to Anna that she was afraid to get him mended too soon, because then they might come and fetch him again. Brigitte did not realize that the army only gave up what was absolutely beyond being used. The miracle of Hansl's homecoming even restored some of her confidence and she began to believe that one day the eldest son might also return from his Russian imprisonment. Probably he also would be much less strong and healthy than when she gave him up for the army, but there was no need to worry, because she would put him right also.

It took her a long time to realize that Hansl would never get right again. He himself was perfectly aware what ailed him. He took an almost exaggerated care not to catch cold. He was continually in need of air and could not stay for more than half a minute in a room where people were smoking. At the beginning Brigitte had to laugh. "Well,

well! I wonder what will happen when his father is back. He smokes from the moment he gets up, and goes to bed at night with his pipe!" The boy himself amused the others with a little story which he told in his tired and panting voice. "Yes, and then the doctor said: 'I'm sorry for you, but you can't be allowed to go back to the trenches.'—'And what can I be allowed to do then, doctor?'—'You can go back to your mother at home and try to get a light job in the open air. You might become a forester or something like that.'—'Well, I'll see what I can do, doctor.'"

It was indeed a lucky thing that he had come home just at the time when the Baron wanted to put the temporary forester in old Eisengruber's place. It was one of the last things which Georg settled himself. He had a talk with the old farmer which almost ended in an open quarrel. Eisengruber first asked whether it would be too much for him to be allowed to stay on the farm for the few years that were left to him. "If you don't try to interfere with the authority of the new farmer," said Georg. The new farmer, who was present at the conversation, declared at once that he could not possibly imagine Eisengruber would make things difficult for him. Apparently he was not afraid of the old man. Eisengruber had not as much as looked at him. Unexpectedly he put the question: "And what if my boy comes back?"

"You've been telling every one that he doesn't want to do any more farming."

"But supposing I was mistaken? If later he feels for it after all, when all those things at the front are over?"

"I can't wait for that," said Georg.

The old farmer muttered something like: "It isn't his fault if they hold him back there. How long have I not been waiting for him, trying to make shift with insufficient assistance?" But his wife nervously plucked at his sleeve and signified with frightened eyes that he was not to tell any more dreadful things to the Herr Baron.

And thus Rudinger began his career as the new farmer. He seemed indeed to understand the business, though not as much perhaps as he had told Georg. He introduced a few innovations which were accepted with distrust because nobody was keen on him. Everybody knew the rough and merciless severity with which he had treated young poachers when he was a forester, although those were days of poverty and hunger. The first Sunday he was in charge he nearly let loose the watch-dog against some people from town who were trying to beg for a little food and went with their rucksack from farmer to farmer to find a supplement to their own miserable pittance.

People particularly resented the manner in which he had wormed his way into the Baron's confidence. Every one tried to make him feel this contempt. But at the first attempt at rebellion he dismissed an

old farm maid who had been working there for many years. The victim went crying to Elisabeth, who was unable to help her because Georg resented any resistance against Rudinger's authority. After that people were afraid of the new farmer, who walked among his people silently and with a wicked look on his face, entirely indifferent to their dislike. He dragged his left leg behind him and the only person towards whom he was kindly and friendly was the youngest maid, Christl. She too loathed him, but she was afraid of him and when he put his arm paternally round her shoulders she let him do so with a frightened smile. When he still was forester he had made things difficult for her, but then she could at least allow herself angrily to slap his hand. Now she was convinced that he had made himself farmer here merely in order to get her in his power.

In the autumn of this year 1918 Austria undertook a last large-scale attempt to cross the Piave, which ended in a bloody defeat. Earlier Germany had launched four waves of attack in the west in which no account whatever was taken of human life. The armies of the Entente, strengthened with American contingents, seemed invincible. The fatal and humiliating end of the titanic struggle appeared to be in sight. There were hunger riots behind the lines. Obstinate rumours about an armistice and about secret negotiations paralysed the men in the trenches. They did not want to die when peace was so near.

And yet the real end came with amazing unexpectedness, like an avalanche that suddenly descends a mountain. Bulgaria and Turkey gave way. But no one could believe that the English had really broken through the German Siegfried line, because it was universally known to be impregnable. It was also the English who first stormed the Austrian trenches at Vittorio Veneto and chased before them in confusion the ragged armies of the dual monarchy. The extent of the confusion could hardly be realized far away in the countryside, even though something of it came to the ears of the people. Regiments and divisions suddenly fell asunder into hostile camps. Czechs, Austrians, Hungarians and Croats who had been fighting shoulder to shoulder under one flag began to shoot at each other with the accumulated hatred of generations. All the tribes of Slavs were confronted with the paradoxical fact that although they were soldiers of a defeated army they were in fact the victors. They ran over to the enemy of yesterday, taking with them their artillery and their ammunition. There were also examples of loyalty to the bitter end. Officers who had great personal authority were able to keep together troops composed of divergent nationalities, and were able to take leave of their troops with the decorum of an old-time parade when the Armistice was signed. The men stood in perfect alignment, presented arms, and looked silently at their leader as, with a cool smile on his

lips, he walked along the line and joked with a soldier who had not a single button left on his uniform.

The clever heads who had shown such fine organizing talents when they arranged for the departure of the troops to the front, for their transport and for their feeding, had forgotten to envisage the problem of preserving these returning soldiers from peace-time chaos. The soldiers had to help themselves as if they were in enemy country while they made their way to their homes where greater privations still were in store. Meanwhile the news came of the German collapse. There were mutinies at Kiel, Hamburg, Bremen. In Munich and in Berlin the Republic was proclaimed. The Kaiser fled to Holland. Already revolution was passing through the towns of the monarchy, and Karl, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, was compelled to abdicate. Italy, who had come into the war for the sake of profit and had suffered nothing but defeat, now took the offensive and entered Southern Tyrol after the Armistice had been concluded. In forced marches it conquered material and large blocks of Austrian territory, made prisoners of war, and, at the peace negotiations, put forward still larger claims. In Hungary the Roumanians behaved in the same way. But the Slovenes made a mistake when in the general confusion they tried to add the main part of Carinthia to their new Slav state. The inhabitants organized a spontaneous resistance, and the men of Carinthia, who had just come back from the front, took up the arms they had already thrown away. After four years of war many of them realized for the first time what they were fighting for.

Father Aigner discovered that he had been right after all when he preached about the sacred soil of Carinthia. It was with a sense of liberation that he suddenly realized that here was a fight that did not conflict with God's will. For him it was a palpable truth that one had to defend one's own soil and one's own home, most particularly against these Slovenes who for generations had found work and bread in these rich lands and now claimed them as their own. Though not far from sixty, Father Aigner, in his black soutane, carrying his cross and his breviary, joined the improvised trained bands which went under elected officers to hold up the invaders. He deemed it his duty to strengthen these heroic defenders of Carinthia with his blessing and to help those who might fall on their way to Heaven.

Now that war had come so nigh, everybody who spoke German and felt himself Carinthian volunteered. The peasants left their lonely farms and, as they knew by experience that one could not resist the enemy with a scythe or a hayfork, they all applied for modern rifles. And of these enough were left over from the Great War.

One evening, when the guns could be heard from Maria-Licht, even the labourer with his artificial arm ran to Klagenfurt to convince the gentlemen of the emergency committee that he could still give a good

account of himself. He was amazed when they refused to put him in uniform. He returned late at night murmuring rebelliously against their injustice.

The schoolboys were particularly enthusiastic. Stephan, who had shocked Elisabeth one day by telling her that he would refuse to fight, hurried home on his bicycle to ask whether he might volunteer. He mentioned the names of several boys from his class whose parents had already given permission. Georg refused to allow him, but Stephan felt that Papa was only trying to keep him home for the sake of Elisabeth, who stood there wringing her hands. In defiance of all authority he ran downstairs and jumped on his bicycle. Georg looked after him through the window with a strange excitement in his eyes. He did not call him back. Did he realize how completely his authority had failed? Perhaps he was simply unable to realize what was actually taking place, but it is more likely that he felt that since Rudi had fallen other losses meant little. Perhaps Stephan was going to avenge his brother. But Elisabeth was already running down in order to fetch her young brother back from Klagenfurt.

This step, however, did not prove to be necessary. Most of the boys who were unable to show a written authorization from their parents and who were in any case completely untrained were rejected. Stephan felt bitterly disappointed and crestfallen. That evening he did not venture home until Herr Klaus accompanied him. He looked shamefacedly at Elisabeth and this had the effect of increasing her distress. She felt a sense of guilt and wondered whether she had again wronged him by putting on the brakes at a determining moment of his life. The schools had closed and for several days he remained at home. All he asked was to be allowed to go to Klagenfurt in order to read the latest news. Elisabeth let him go.

Once again Georg had been awakened out of the dusk of old age that was gathering round him. What was happening in this world? It is true that Rudinger, whose prophecies impressed him so much, had foretold in the spring that the war could not last another winter and that the monarchy was sure to fall to pieces, but what the forester had not been able to prophesy was that officers who had fought as bravely for their country as Rudi would have the insignia of their rank torn from their uniforms, that the Emperor would be sent away and that the nobility would be abolished.

Georg tried hard to realize the significance of this last incredible news. For himself he did not mind any longer, but he thought of his children. Stephan would not become Baron Weygand. Did people imagine that this would change anything? If one was a nobleman, one remained it even if one had no title. An edict from Vienna made no difference to this. Nobility was merely a concept, an attitude towards life, which implied more duties than rights. The first duty

was to remember the ancestors upon whom an Emperor had once bestowed a distinction. To remove from a person the outward symbol of his responsibilities could only make him a less worthy character. Georg knew that he would himself remain a nobleman till his death, and he hoped that Stephan would be equally invulnerable. He had had his doubts in the past, but since Stephan had shown himself a Weygand when the Slovenes invaded the country, he knew better. What was this impotent envy that made people in Vienna gratuitously take away titles of nobility? If they had taken Maria-Licht from him he would have understood. But why his title? What did they want? Equality among all men? Did they imagine themselves capable of suppressing an order of things that had been established by nature itself? Perhaps they imagined they could. After all they had got it into their heads that soldiers' councils of war could take the place of trained generals.

For the first time in his life Georg took notice of the way in which people addressed him in the castle and on the farm. There was no reason to worry. The whole staff, indignant about the news from Vienna which they could hardly believe, took particular care to show that they at any rate did not admit this new-fangled nonsense. They were not going to put themselves against the law of God and of the country. Formerly when they talked about him they called him the Major. But now he was "the Baron" for everybody. One of the farm hands who came back from the war had the temerity to laugh at this. He was promptly sent to Coventry. Anyhow the girls were rather angry with him because he had not volunteered to fight for Carinthia.

As for that fight, it was impossible to keep it up against such a powerful enemy. The Slovenes were thrown back behind the Drav, but then the new government of Belgrade sent a number of regiments with artillery, and the liberated territory was once more occupied. The Servians advanced as far as Klagenfurt. Meanwhile peace treaties had been drawn up in France and the people of Carinthia hoped that they had given sufficient proof of their desire for freedom to prevent the powerful men of Versailles and St. Germain from adding this territory to their new creation Yugo-Slavia.

Most of the Austrian and Hungarian portion of the former monarchy was completely paralysed. Conscious of their complete impotence, people waited with dull fatalism. They tried to realize that it was peace once more, or at least that the war was over. For four years every one had longed for peace as though it were paradise, something too good ever to be achieved again. And now there was peace, and was this not the main thing? Certainly there were still further humiliations and horrors, like the one-sided handing over of the prisoners of war and the continuation of the hunger blockade.

Tuberculosis increased among the children in the towns. But at least mass murder at the fronts had come to an end and the men were coming back from the trenches. These men tried to realize that it was peace and they attempted to live and to work in the midst of their families as though they had not been away for four years. But it was all very difficult indeed. It appeared almost impossible to recapture the existence of the days before 1914. It was as though they had all forgotten how they thought and behaved in those days. No certainty was left, neither political nor economic nor moral. It was as though men did not know what to do with this peace. They continued to wait for something that would restore meaning and content to their life.

The factories were idle. They had been built for a large market: for the whole empire. Now frontiers were closed everywhere; there was unemployment in the towns and hundreds of thousands who flocked to them in their distress found neither food nor shelter. When was salvation to come? Would the former enemy show no mercy? Nobody could believe that it was really intended to cede German-speaking Tyrol to the Italians, that the monarchy would keep no sea harbour and that the Czechs would be rewarded for their attitude by being granted a large state at the expense of Austria and Hungary. How could Galicia go to the Poles, or Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia and Slavonia go to Yugo-Slavia, the final realization of the dream of a Greater Serbia? Once the claims of Roumania had been fulfilled, Hungary would at any rate fulfil its ardent wish of becoming an independent state on its own. But what a state! And would enough be left of Austria to make it possible for the name of Austria to endure? Was a capital like Vienna, the old glorious Metropolis of the Hapsburg Empire, not a mockery for a state with a population of only a few millions? The victors alleged that this war would avenge injustice, but did they not fear that the world would once more have to bleed in order to restore this new injustice and to re-establish a people that had been maimed in this harsh, stupid and ungenerous way. Why remain enemies now that the struggle was over and that a lasting peace was being built? Were Germany and the monarchy solely responsible for the war? And was their defeat the only proof of their guilt? People felt that they had already suffered four years of bitter punishment and now came the *coup de grâce* inflicted by the former enemy. There had been an idea that war could bring no advantages. Was this not a mistake? No, this could not be the last war. If it were, men would have passed for nothing through this inferno of iron, blood and fire.

Round the green tables where the future of the populations of Europe was being decided there was no room for justice, but only for blind vengeance and unconcealed greed. Those who struggled

there for their own interests did not notice so much of this, but the silent spectators who had no voice in the debates drew back in horror at the sight.

Elisabeth also realized how completely her country had collapsed. But she was a woman and she left it to the men to submit or to rebel. All she knew was that she was responsible for Stephan and that it was her duty to enable him to build up his future in this place. All these public miseries were hardly noticeable at Maria-Licht. The fields were being worked and bore fruit. As in every year there were foals and calves in the stables. There was talk of a plebiscite that would determine whether Carinthia was to be incorporated in Yugo-Slavia. The Servians were lording it at Klagenfurt, and once or twice a few Slovene soldiers, commanded by a non-commissioned officer, came to Maria-Licht to carry out requisitions. At first they behaved with all the arrogance of half-civilized inhabitants of the Balkans. But Elisabeth, who had long experience of Slovene day labourers, soon gained their confidence with a few glasses of slivovitz. Whereupon the sergeant appeared before her and with soldierly courtesy declared that he would be satisfied with half the amount he had been told to fetch. And this after all was the main thing.

In the autumn Ignaz came back from Russia and thoroughly enjoyed the sensation he created. He told a grand story about a young girl, the proud and ravishingly beautiful daughter of a Russian general, whom he had saved from certain death together with her family. He promised to give further details one evening when they could all sit round the table to listen to him at leisure. He had learned to speak fluent Russian and he wanted to begin at once with a demonstration of his newly acquired skill in Russian cookery. He was so thin that his bones almost stuck out of his tanned skin, but otherwise the war had done him no harm. He came back a wiser man, or so he said, and he covered his wife with kisses as though they were still courting. He picked up his little Hanni and said he could hardly believe that this big girl was his own daughter. But his big beard frightened her, and Mariedl had some difficulty in persuading her that he was her father. "Don't you see he is your father?" she kept repeating to the child. At last Hanni, who had watched him kissing her mother, consented to call him "Daddy" and to kiss him as well. Ignaz was so touched that tears appeared in his eyes.

The loss of his beloved zither somewhere in Siberia provided Ignaz with further material for a thrilling narrative. As he repeated it each time with fresh details, the general's daughter began to play an increasing part in the story, not altogether to the satisfaction of Mariedl. In later years he told the story of the lost zither to his grandchildren, and in the end he almost brought himself to believe that this

instrument had been a bone of contention which prolonged the war by more than a year. Mariedl went to Klagenfurt and bought him a new zither with her savings. It was a joy for her to see his childlike smile when he played it the same evening. "Look," he exclaimed, "my fingers have not even grown stiff!" As in days long past, the maids from the farm came to listen and to look at his face as he bent pensively over the chords. Just as in the olden days one wisp of dark hair fell over his forehead. But now there was some silver among the dark hairs. His lean body, his brown face, gave him an even more manly appearance, and the long journey from Siberia made him more interesting and mysterious than ever.

The return of Ignaz was very unsettling for Brigitte. She wondered whether it did not promise that her own son, Franzl, might reappear one of these days? Elisabeth enquired in Vienna for her, but in the capital people were too preoccupied with other matters to have time for the son of a Carinthian forester who was reported missing. Franzl's father returned a few days after the Armistice, and went himself to Vienna. His earnest and honest face opened many doors and enabled him to get through to the highest authorities. But he was told that nothing could be done and that the wisest thing would be to preserve as few illusions as possible.

During the journey home Franz made up his mind to tell his wife only part of the truth. But she noticed that after his journey to Vienna he never mentioned their eldest boy. Little Erik was eleven now and seemed to him his successor. It was clear from the beginning that with his damaged lungs Hansl would never be a forester by himself. He could not stand the night air and the damp. And yet it was becoming more necessary than ever for Franz to go out every night, because the poachers were more numerous and more reckless. Hansl himself realized this, and he did not mind in the least that his father looked upon little Erik as his successor. He talked openly about it, and besides he was particularly fond of his little brother. He took him round in the daytime when the weather was fine and showed him the ways and the secrets of the profession. His mother's care had made Hansl fat and heavy, and his outward appearance was like that of his father. But all this apparent health and strength was of no avail. He had no breath and was all wrong inside. Sometimes his father looked at him, observed him quietly, and then turned away with a bitter twitch of the mouth. If only he could give his own healthy lungs in exchange for those of Hansl. For the sake of his boy he gave up smoking. He consoled himself with the thought that decent tobacco was not to be obtained for love or money. Now his pipe stood against a blue Saxony vase on the mantelpiece as a memory of happier days and almost as a relic of a beloved dead person.

One day Dr. Prisswitz appeared unexpectedly at the gate of Maria-

Licht. At first no one recognized him because he wore dark spectacles, and his hair had turned rather grey. But he had still the same round and highly-coloured cheeks of a peasant's son. Elisabeth uttered a cry of surprise when she saw him and fell on his neck with joy. She wanted to take him at once to her father, who was sitting in the library, but when they entered the Major looked up in a way that made it clear they were not welcome. It was rather painful and she did not know at first what to say. "Don't you recognize the doctor?" she asked. She had taken the precaution of shouting the visitor's name before she opened the door, but Papa looked at the visitor as though he were an intruder. Dr. Prisswitz tried to help Elisabeth over the awkward moment by talking unconcernedly and telling about his experiences in the Balkans, but while she was pretending to listen very attentively, Elisabeth noticed that her father was getting up to leave the room. He muttered something about having business at the farm and walked out without a further word of greeting to his visitor: "You must excuse Papa," she said, when the door had closed behind him. "He isn't what he used to be."

Dr. Prisswitz courteously dismissed the incident by remarking in a slightly melancholy tone: "Is any one of us still the same?"

It was in the same detached manner that he answered Elisabeth's query about his dark glasses. It was all his own stupid fault, he said. He had allowed himself to be contaminated by one of his victims in the Balkans. He could hardly complain because it was after all a very pardonable form of revenge. It wouldn't have been so dreadful if he could have been treated at once. He had just had a rather painful operation in Vienna. How his friends in the Caucasus would laugh if they heard of it! But he still had hopes of a complete cure. While at the front he had secretly planned to make use of the surgical knowledge acquired at such heavy expense. As an ageing bachelor, he would set out to take his degree in surgery. But of course there could be no surgery without a pair of healthy eyes. At the front it didn't matter if you cut a little too much to the right or to the left. Everything was on the grand scale there, but in civilian life people were inclined to be more particular.

Then he switched the conversation to Elisabeth. He wanted to hear more about her. She found it difficult at first to talk about all her concerns, but soon she felt at ease and told him of all her worries. From behind the dark glasses his big eyes looked at her with profound sympathy. What a relief it was to talk so freely! For the first time she discovered how long she had been in need of this kind of heart-to-heart talk. It was like an intimate confession in which she could express all her bitterness. Ever since Paul's death she had felt bitter towards her father for taking notice of nothing except the loss of Rudi, and towards the whole world because it behaved in a way

that made Paul's sacrifice a vain thing. She also talked about Stephan's weak character. He was so entirely unaccountable! In a couple of years he would go to study in Vienna and she was almost afraid to let him go. Honestly, it was not a selfish desire to keep her brother with her as long as possible. In the past she might perhaps have minded being left alone with her father, but wasn't she lonely now even when Stephan was there? All the boy's thoughts were for his school friends.

Then she began to question Dr. Prisswitz about the great social and political changes that had taken place. It was difficult to grow used to the new situation. For Papa it was easy enough, he simply refused to take notice of the new order of things. Every one here respected him so much that there was no thought of dropping his ancient title. He could allow himself to live in a world of make-belief. But what of Stephan? Ought she to train him to the idea that he would later inherit certain duties, or would it be simpler from now on to extinguish all sentiments of tradition in him? It was true the tradition did not live strongly in him and he found it difficult enough to act towards his school comrades as one who was their superior by birth. On the contrary, he seemed to have developed a real sense of inferiority towards his middle-class schoolmates, even before he began to feel ashamed of his title.

Abel Prisswitz allowed her to have her say without interrupting her. Strange dreams passed through his head when he saw her so frail and so much in need of consolation. He would so have liked to offer his assistance, to stand by her with all his strength and understanding. He saw in a vision the fulfilment of his wildest aspirations. She had nobody left in the world. Would she reject his offer if he had the courage to make it now? Now, at this very moment? Would the affection which she had long felt for him be likely to change very slowly into something deeper? Were they not kindred, since life had so utterly disappointed them both?

There she sat before him, the woman who could have given him happiness. There she sat, proud in her grief and in her worries, slender and fair and more exquisite than ever to his eyes which perceived her through the half-darkness of his glasses. And he knew that his dream was doomed for ever to remain a dream. Perhaps if he had not gone to the Vienna specialist he might have had the courage to speak. But the specialist talked to him as to a fellow physician and ruthlessly told him the truth. The chance that he might preserve his eyesight, even after his operation, was infinitesimal. The dream could never come true. No, he was not going to offer generous assistance and support when, in a few years, he would become entirely dependent on her.

He chose, therefore, to talk about indifferent things, to air his views

about the future of the nobility: "You can be sure of one thing, child; long after this new-fangled republic has become a mere memory, the legend of the old empire will subsist, and it will never harm Stephan to remember that he belonged to this nobility which was abolished by a republican decree. You may tell him this in the name of a bourgeois."

Elisabeth looked dreamily before her. Then with a slight smile she held out her hand to Dr. Prisswitz. He bowed over it and pressed his lips upon it.

It was the last winter that Stephan went to the gymnasium. The rector informed Elisabeth that unless her brother worked much harder than at present he had no chance whatever of matriculating. The rector explained that Stephan did not always choose the right kind of company, and that insufficient supervision was exercised over his homework.

Elisabeth was painfully surprised and felt inclined to accuse herself. But how could she have kept an eye on Stephan's work when he sometimes stayed away from home for a whole week? He happened to be there that evening and she silently handed him the rector's note. His reaction was immediate. It was an indignant and rather childish outburst against his school. Why should he have to go to a kindergarten till summer! Once he was a student he would no longer be told who were the people he could meet out of hours. The rector need not worry, he said. He would see to it that he was successful.

Elisabeth listened to him with mixed feelings. Stephan had excited her attention by the remark that it was no one's business whom he saw after school hours. What did he do in his free time? Apparently the rector's note had impressed him more than he was prepared to admit and Elisabeth was able to persuade him to come home every day as long as the weather permitted. He even allowed her to look at his homework. One day while he was away she looked through his exercise books to see what marks he had been given. A little note fell from one of them. It was signed "Sophie," the name of the elder Klaus girl. Elisabeth loathed the idea of reading a note that was not meant for her, but she felt compelled to do so, and the note provided the key to the mystery of Stephan's dilatoriness. Curiously enough Elisabeth's first impulse was one of jealousy. Did the intimacy between Stephan and this sixteen-year-old girl, which this note seemed to convey, really exist? She read the sentence which had first not entirely penetrated to her until she felt convinced that there was more between these two than calf-love. The girl tried to express her physical desire in exalted and poetic words. Elisabeth kept the note, and the following morning she went to town to visit Herr Klaus.

She preferred to see him alone, and therefore she went to his office rather than to his home. Curiously enough, Herr Klaus seemed ill at ease. Before Elisabeth spoke a word he sent his secretary out of the room.

"I shan't detain you long, Herr Klaus. I only wanted to have a word with you about Stephan. . . ."

"But, please, do take a seat." He looked rather uncertainly at her.

She fished the note from her handbag and showed it to him.

"Yes . . . it's Sophie's writing," he said awkwardly, and he folded up the note without giving himself the time to read it properly. "What do you wish me to do?"

"Did you know about it?" Elisabeth asked with amazement.

He made a vague gesture. "My wife thought she had noticed something. But we ourselves had already realized that with the difference in social position . . ." Elisabeth opened her eyes wide. "Difference in social position." She had not thought of this so soon, but suddenly she realized that this petty bourgeois who had made his pile had closed his eyes intentionally in the ridiculous hope that this might be the way to get a better husband for his daughter! Apparently the revolution had not yet blotted out all social differences in Austria. Dr. Prisswitz was right. She found it difficult to suppress her indignation. "The only thought that struck me," she said, "is that Stephan is only seventeen, and I should have imagined that you would have still far more reason . . ."

"Yes, yes," the banker agreed with a scarlet face. "But as I told you, my wife and I thought it was something innocent."

Elisabeth rose from her chair. "I am now going to speak to the rector. I've heard that he takes in some boys as boarders and perhaps there will be room for Stephan. It would seem the best solution for us, and also for you. I suggest that you do not mention anything about the note to your daughter. My intention also is not to tell Stephan that I've found it. If he has to go and live with the rector it will be merely for the sake of his examination. He knows very well himself that his chances are none too good."

Herr Klaus nodded guiltily and Elisabeth hurried to the rector. There she was understood without having to be explicit, and the rector accepted the charge of her brother for a few months. Stephan was called to the rector's room and turned pale when he saw his sister there. Perhaps he suspected that he had been found out. When he heard of the decision that had been taken in his own interest he showed himself so submissive, and so entirely devoid of a will of his own, that Elisabeth felt altogether uncomfortable.

She left the school with a sad and unsatisfied feeling and she found it difficult to go straight home to explain to her father what she had just arranged. Obeying a sudden impulse, she drove to Dr. Prisswitz's

house. The doctor had not shown himself since his first unexpected visit. She was disappointed when Johann told her that his master was still in bed. Nowadays, he said, he did not get up much before his reception hour. Elisabeth wondered what was behind this strange behaviour, and looked enquiringly at the faithful old servant, when a voice called from upstairs: "Who is there, Johann?"—"The lady from Maria-Licht, doctor!" There was a moment's silence. "Ask the young lady if she will wait just a second," shouted the voice, and Elisabeth had to allow herself to be shown into the drawing-room. "We always keep the curtains half-closed," said Johann. "It's because of his eyes, you know." As she was there, alone in the half-dark, while outside the wintry sun was shining brightly, her nervousness increased. Were his eyes so bad that he had to live in semi-darkness? Was this why he stayed in bed half the day? At last she heard his heavy footsteps and the door opened. Though the half-light was flattering, if anything, she saw at once how tired his face looked. He wore no spectacles and she was startled by the painful expression in his eyes, though he tried to smile at her and pretended to be merry. "Too dreadful that I should just happen to be in bed when you call! I stayed up rather late yesterday evening with a few friends." Even if she had not been told another story by his servant, she would have noticed that he was fibbing. His face looked desperately sad, and there was an air of depression about his old-fashioned and uncomfortable drawing-room. She felt vaguely that it was a pity there was no woman to take care of him, to make his house inhabitable, and to prevent his staying up with friends to the detriment of his health. No doubt that he drank more than was good for him. He had always been inclined that way but now there seemed to be nothing to hold him back. Perhaps he needed the wine to console himself because his life was entirely without prospects. She felt terribly sorry for him.

Did he feel that she had seen through him? Suddenly he gave up all pretence. Without looking at her he said: "Why should I get up before my patients need me? I merely took you for the first patient. People have forgotten the way to my consulting-room. One doesn't get rewarded for having served one's country. The mere fact that I've been a military surgeon makes the public think I cure colds by cutting off legs. I think I've lost my bedside manner; I find it impossible to work up the right amount of sympathy when I ask a lady about her headache. Yesterday I had an old patient here and he said: 'I'm glad, doctor, that during these five years nothing went wrong with me, because I shouldn't have liked to go to another doctor.' He came to talk and smoke a cigar with me, not to consult me. That kind of patient at any rate has remained faithful!"

Elisabeth made no effort to smile at his wry humour. "And your plans for studying surgery?" she asked. She waited for his reply

with a kind of suppressed excitement. He did not look at her. "After much meditation I've given them up. I shall be glad if I can continue to be a modest country doctor, and nothing more. One shouldn't be too ambitious."

A silence fell, which Elisabeth broke with difficulty.

"When shall we see you again at Maria-Licht?" she asked.

He looked distrustfully at her. "Anything wrong with your father, or with somebody else?"

"No, doctor, this time you're the patient yourself," she said. "Now and then you ought to come and breathe our forest air. You shouldn't always be cooped up with Johann in this half-dark house."

"All right, I'll come round soon," he promised, and his voice revealed how moved he was by her kindness.

He returned into his drawing-room after he had seen her out and stayed there in silence for a while. Then in his tortured eyes that were doomed to lose their sight a strange, feverish light appeared. He rose in order to shave with more care than on other days. He made a sudden and entirely unjustified scene to his man, because his clothes had not been properly brushed. Johann was altogether upset by it and ran to the window. How on earth could his master, who nowadays could only read big newsprint, suddenly have detected a few specks of dust on his collar? Had he really noticed them or had he merely surmised that they were bound to be there? Johann felt afraid that this suspiciousness was a result of his growing blindness and that it might yet take more unpleasant forms. At the same time he consoled himself with the thought that his master's sudden desire to be so neat would probably not last long after sunset. He felt reassured when, very early on the following morning, he had to help him as usual to undress and go to bed. While he drew off the doctor's boots he didn't even listen to his strange and incoherent talk. His master declared that he, Abel Prisswitz, had become conscious of a number of things which made him feel no dearer wish than to become entirely blind in the shortest possible time, so that he could fill the night around him with images from his dreams. He wanted nothing else. "Do you hear that, Johann? I want to be as blind as the destiny that guides our lives!"

At home Elisabeth said nothing to her father about the note she found. The rector said, she told him, that if Stephan was to pass at the end of the session he would have to work under stricter supervision. Later she wondered whether her father had taken in what she said. Where were his thoughts while he stared vacantly and seemed to listen to something no one else could hear? Yesterday he suddenly asked her when it would be Christmas. Christmas was Rudi's birthday and also the time of his last visit.

Elisabeth found it difficult to get the money she needed for Stephan.

The farm brought in much less than it used to do. Rudinger attributed this to insufficient manuring during the last few years, and the proceeds of the crops had been used to a large extent for buying new instruments, which were poor in quality and continually rose in price. He was right, she said to herself, and she had done him an injustice by distrusting him. She would have liked to know what Eisengruber thought about the course of events on the farm, but the old man no longer rose from his chair and she loathed going to the farm. It used to be a pleasure to her to visit the stables and to look at the calves and the foals, but now her pleasure was spoilt. It was as though the maids and the labourers were afraid that the farmer might catch them talking to her. Rudinger himself was exaggeratedly courteous with her, but he could not deceive her, and she knew that he hated her as much as she hated him. She rarely showed herself on the farm and usually she waited until she saw her father go. Then she observed with contempt how Rudinger played the part of devoted servant towards him.

Old Eisengruber seemed to have sworn not to open his mouth again except in order to say unpleasant things to his wife, who looked after him with infinite self-sacrifice and patience. Elisabeth had heard that Toni went straight from the front to Vienna, where he took part in the revolution and was a member of a soldiers' council. He was still there, but no one knew precisely what he was doing. Perhaps the old man felt ashamed of it and this was the reason of his silence. But his grim air showed that he criticised the whole management of the farm. He lived with his wife in a little building which used to be a dairy. It had been converted into a living-room. When the weather was good he crawled round the farm and had a look at the stables when he knew that Rudinger was out. At the beginning the labourers and the maids still treated him with deference, but when they saw that he refused to reply, they preferred to ignore him. Old Magdalena was still ready to converse with people. She sobbed out her sorrow to Elisabeth at Toni's behaviour: he had not even written on the occasion of his father's last birthday. Would he give any sign of life at Christmas? If she did not know her boy so well, if she had not been so sure that his heart was in the right place, she would now begin to doubt him. Was she going to see him again before her death? She told Elisabeth that Brigitte also had put all her hope upon this coming Christmas. Brigitte prayed fervently before the manger with the infant Jesus in the church of Seekirchen. On her way home in the wintry dusk she began to believe that a miracle might happen. She hurried back to her husband and as soon as she was indoors she said to him: "He's coming back! Franzl is coming back!" Her two daughters looked at her with amazement, and then they saw that their father silently put his arm round her shoulders.

They knew enough. They so often heard that their eldest brother, whom they hardly remembered, was on the point of coming home. But he did not come back, and slowly they began to believe that this brother was alive only in their mother's imagination. Sixteen-year-old Trudi even allowed herself a half-mocking smile. She did not like her mother and wanted to make it clear how ridiculous she thought her.

As could have been expected, the missing brother did not come down from Heaven this Christmas. But Hansl caught a chill because his mother had insisted that he should accompany her to the midnight Mass in order to pray with her. A chill was something very dreadful for Hansl. He lay in bed with a high fever, struggling for breath. Brigitte nursed him night and day, and kept repeating to herself: "It is my fault if God takes him away from me. I did not deserve that Franzl should return to me and that's why he hasn't come back. Now I have my punishment!"

Toni did at any rate write from Vienna, but his father obstinately refused to have the letter read aloud to him, and his mother cried bitter tears because her son had written that he wanted to go abroad as soon as possible. He said that Austria was getting too small for him. "First our farm was not large enough for him," she said, "and now the whole country is too small to hold him," she grumbled to Elisabeth, who felt sorry for her and could find nothing to say.

Nobody at Maria-Licht suspected that Elisabeth also waited for something to happen this Christmas and that she too was sadly disappointed. Since the end of the war she had one ceaseless pre-occupation: was she going to hear from Angélique at last? It seemed incredible that her sister had broken all ties with her parental home and that she did not even wish to hear what had happened in the last four or five years. Did not her intelligence tell her that by now no one could be angry with her?

If only Elisabeth had known for certain that her sister was happy she would have resigned herself and ceased to feel the need to get in touch with her. But supposing she were unhappy, supposing that this was the reason of her silence! She might still feel her old pride or she might have lost her strength and her courage. Immediately after the Armistice Elisabeth began to look out avidly for news from her sister. Now that Christmas was coming she decided to act. Father Aigner was the only one she took into her secret. She enquired from the Paris Society of Composers and Musicians for the address of the violinist Desmond. It took some time before they sent a frigid little note which merely said that they doubted whether the gentleman whose address they enclosed would be prepared to resume relations with Austria at this early date. The tone of this letter froze her heart. Involuntarily she thought of Angélique, who had lived among French

people as an Austrian throughout this war. But she knew at least how to get at her!

At the same time the address, that of a chalet in the neighbourhood of Lausanne, had something real that warmed her heart. She tried to imagine how Angélique would live there. How had she developed during the last five years? Did she ever speak German nowadays? Perhaps she had been entirely absorbed by her French-Swiss environment. The only people she saw would be artists, of course. How strange and how attractive it must be to be the wife of a musician! Elisabeth put the address in front of her and began a long letter to her sister. She told her everything in great detail; she tried to explain that there was no resentment on her part. She confessed her great solitude and her desire to see her sister again. She described how Papa was a broken old man who was slowly losing all sense of reality, and who lived only for his dreams and on his memory of Rudi, which grew vaguer every day. There was certainly no need for Angélique to be afraid of the old man any longer. She dispatched the letter which carried her most ardent prayers, but there was no reply.

After three weeks she wrote a second letter. It was in French this time, and addressed to Desmond. She begged him to let her know where her sister was. Again there was no reply. Both letters had been registered and must have reached their destination. It was obvious, therefore, that no correspondence with her was wanted. She was defeated. Then she remembered all the humiliations she had undergone at the hands of Angélique in the past. Had it been painful for her sister to receive a letter from her Austrian relations? Did she still hate her as much as formerly when they were children? While Elisabeth tried to overcome her grievous disappointment, with no one to confide in, she began to feel that she had to reproach herself for much that had happened. During the last days of July, 1914, she had thought only of Paul; she could not, therefore, blame Angélique for not having told her anything about her intended flight. Had she ever tried to gain her younger sister's affection and confidence? She had always been so certain that she was right; how could she expect affection in return for this? She had been proud and pretentious and the thought of herself in the past now filled her with loathing. If only she had understood something of her sister's great and deep feeling for this man, she would have supported her in her plans, putting common sense to flight, instead of telling Papa everything. Notwithstanding the war, Angélique would have kept in touch with her, and she would not have lost her younger sister for ever.

Stephan also was not fond of her. The harsh decision she had taken at the beginning of winter seemed justified when the rector wrote to her that he was doing his best and that his chances of success had considerably increased. But was this not in itself a proof of her failure?

There had been a time when a rapprochement seemed likely between her father and herself, but then Paul came between them. Since then there had not been a day when she could fill the void left by Rudi in her father's heart. Yes, Rudi had been fond of her. But he was so infinitely kind and generous and he had simply refused to see her disagreeable characteristics. Perhaps Rudi had realized how hard she was fighting her own stern and cold nature.

She felt nervous of Father Aigner when she told him the negative result of her endeavours. She was certain that he would at once understand why, after five years' separation, Angélique still could not overcome her aversion and accept the hand she held out.

Her feeling of guilt towards Stephan drove her to visit him once more at the rector's house. It was as though Stephan came spontaneously towards her and for a moment there was a weak happiness in her heart that filled her with confusion, but on her way home she reflected that Stephan's pleasure was due exclusively to loneliness. He would have been equally pleased by another visit. No, he was not fond of her. She had only herself to reproach for her own isolation. She put everybody off. She had offended Aunt Louisa by not replying to her letters. She had done an injustice to Paul's sister by resenting the fact that, in her anxiety for her husband, she forgot her brother's death. Last Christmas there had been no letter from Munich. Little Hilda Althofer, who was so fearfully in love with Rudi, would never forgive her for not asking her to Maria-Licht for Rudi's last leave. Elisabeth imagined that she would save the girl pain, but would it not have been more womanly to take pity in such a case and not to reason about it? Now Hilda was bound to believe that Elisabeth had intentionally kept her at arm's length and that she wanted to have Rudi entirely for herself. And Elisabeth had to admit that there was some truth in this suspicion.

At last she decided to console herself with the thought that there is an advantage in not being loved. She knew that neither Stephan nor Angélique was fond of her. And what did it matter if a man like Rudinger disliked her? One day she went to him and said: "I should be glad if henceforth you would show your accounts not only to my father but to myself." He looked surprised and tried to emphasize the strength of his position by adopting a slightly mocking tone. "Fräulein Elisabeth, I imagined that I was appointed by your father and not by you."

She was prepared for his kind of reply, and did not at once allow herself to be defeated. "You are no doubt aware of the fact," she replied, "that I'm responsible for a considerable share of the administration here. I only wanted to ask you to render me a little service. I am quite aware that I cannot compel you to render me this service."

He had a moment of hesitation and then he adopted an arrogant

tone which suddenly convinced her that he was ill at ease. "If you imagine that I am deceiving you, you'd better tell your father!"

"I didn't ask your advice; I merely wished to be allowed to see your accounts."

"And I tell you that I owe no duty to any one except to your father!" She looked at his red, bulging face with ironic contempt. Then she turned away silently and left the farm. Her suspicions against this Rudinger had so far been based upon no certain data, but now his conduct confirmed them altogether. She did not know whether she could rejoice at seeing him thus unmasked. What could she do to him? He knew her weakness and he had successfully speculated upon it. Papa had a blind faith in him and would not tolerate any accusation unless it were proved up to the hilt.

At any rate she could hope that the fellow would feel a little frightened by this conversation and that he would put a brake on his exploitation of her father's childlike confidence. She had noticed before that he was afraid of her. Perhaps the continuous silent check she exercised had kept him back more than once from giving way entirely to temptation. Perhaps he would not venture to juggle too impudently with figures in future. His half-lowered eyelids told her of his hatred.

And although she suffered at the thought that no one here loved her, there was a bitter-sweet satisfaction in the knowledge that one person hated her from the bottom of his heart.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

AN ALLY FOR ELISABETH

As a result of the efforts made by Stephan under the rector's constant supervision, he was successful at his final examination. When he came home with the news Elisabeth kissed him warmly; she did not know why she had to cry: no doubt it was merely nerves. "Do you see now how good it was to make you board in the house of the rector?" she asked. But he was not generous enough to allow her to justify herself. "How do you know I would have failed otherwise?"

Yet there was not much room left in him for resentment. He was too happily excited at the idea that after the vacation he would go to Vienna and live there entirely on his own. He had great plans and consented to discuss them with his sister: he was going to get his engineer's diploma in the shortest possible period. There might be no work in this impoverished and shrunken Austria, but other countries actually harried by the war were in need of reconstruction. Bridges and railways would have to be built. Roumania would require large-scale reconstruction of the derricks in its oil-wells. A few other boys in his class were also going to become engineers. They said that the lack of scientifically trained men was so great that even enemy countries had openings for engineers and paid them well. It sounded strange to Elisabeth to hear these words "pay them well" coming from her brother. How had Stephan acquired this desire for money? Here at home such matters were never mentioned. Did it come from himself or was he merely repeating what others said? Anyhow, when he talked like this his voice glowed and she believed him while she listened. She would so much have liked to persuade herself that she felt as he felt. After all, the main thing was that he had an aim before him. She thought of Rudi, who predicted shortly before his death that very different times were coming for the nobility.

However much her conscience pricked her, she had to leave her father to accompany Stephan to Vienna and to find suitable lodgings for him. The adventure of the journey and the few days spent in the capital brought them still closer together. Elisabeth was so glad at this that she forgot how far Stephan had already moved away from her. Before they went he studied a plan of Vienna and he took her round like a trained guide. On the first morning he insisted on visiting the Polytechnic Museum with her. She followed him obediently and allowed him to explain the inventions and the machines of which he imagined he understood the purpose and the working.

The big city suffered from a housing shortage and it proved very difficult to find a suitable room. One of those they visited was sombre and airless, sumptuously furnished in the Maria-Theresa style, with plaster statues and pedestals and heavy fringed curtains. The inhabitants of the house made no effort to hide their resentment because they had to let out rooms. Another room was not clean, and the smell of stale underlinen permeated the house. There were shrieking and fighting children who would have made it impossible for Stephan to concentrate when he studied. Sometimes a room seemed a little more attractive, but then Elisabeth was frightened by the unwholesome glance the young war widow, who was the landlady, cast in the direction of her prospective nineteen-year-old lodger. Three days were lost inspecting totally unsuitable rooms, and each time it was necessary politely to hide the impression one received during the inspection. There were long jeremiads of lower middle-class landladies who declared that with the wicked rise in prices they could no longer make both ends meet on their little pensions. This depressing odyssey completely discouraged Stephan. He had never thought of Vienna as a grey and disconsolate town where naked misery stared from every corner. Gradually he got into the frame of mind in which he was prepared to accept anything. Elisabeth had to struggle not only with her own fatigue but also with his growing disinclination to go on with the search.

After much hesitation she decided to pay a visit to the von Stradas. After all they would have been hurt if they had known that she had been in Vienna without visiting them.

When the visitors were announced, Aunt Louise rushed downstairs and embraced them both. She was unable to utter a single word. Elisabeth saw tears in her eyes, and she saw the traces which the loss of Arnim six years ago had left on this face that used to be so bright and so well preserved. She felt ashamed because she had refused to believe in Aunt Louise's great sorrow at Rudi's death. It had all seemed so exaggerated and artificial to her. But what if Aunt Louise really felt like this? She had been an actress once, and maybe her nature needed to express itself with much outward display. This would not necessarily mean that her grief was insincere. In the drawing-room Elisabeth noticed the photographs of Arnim and Rudi together in one frame, to which was tied a piece of black crêpe. She tried to look away from it, but this was not easy because Aunt Louise sat down precisely underneath the pictures. During a lull in the conversation she intercepted Elisabeth's glance and with a sad smile she said: "Yes, my two boys."

Stephan looked at Elisabeth with surprise: she continued to stare without saying anything. Later Aunt Louise produced more photographs. Here was Mizzi in her bridal dress, holding a bouquet. She

still seemed childlike as she looked with pride at her husband, not a romantic young musician but an elderly banker with a kindly face. "She has a little girl now," said Aunt Louise. Vera was working in Berlin with a doctor whose acquaintance she had made at the front. Louise von Strada almost faltered while making this confession. She looked at Elisabeth, trying to read her thoughts, and added with a sigh, "Yes, my husband and I did not find it easy to get used to the idea, but she never asked for our consent. When she came back from the war she seemed not to have the faintest notion that we might wish to have a say in her affairs. Surely, she said, after allowing her to go to the front, we were not going to interfere if she wished to go to Berlin? Do *you* think it's the same thing? We could not possibly have prevented her doing war work, because, after the death of her only brother, she felt it was her duty. Oh, Elisabeth, it was just as though a stranger had come to our home! She did not even want to live with us, and within two days went and took a room of her own in town. You'd hardly believe it, but I slept more soundly when she was away at the front than when she was back! And yet we heard later that out there she was often enough in real danger. She went through air attacks and bombardments. My husband hoped to bring her back to reason by marrying her off at once. We knew of someone who was sure to make her happy. But she said she wouldn't think of it. She simply laughed at us and took the train for Berlin, to join her doctor. And she is not even in love with him, I swear it to you, Elisabeth. I saw it in her eyes. All she wanted was to be free. If you ask me what's the matter with her, it's that she never got over the loss of Rudi."

Louise von Strada turned towards the photographs behind her, and she did not notice that Elisabeth had turned deadly pale. "Oh," she added, "there's my husband." She tried to compose herself. "How surprised he will be to see you here!"

Though his delicate and pale face was drawn and though his hair had turned entirely grey, Herr von Strada was still true to type. He threw an enquiring glance at Elisabeth. It was as though he wanted to find out whether Louise's hysteria was in any way upsetting her. Later he looked at her more closely. Why was she still unmarried, he wondered. It was a fascinating problem. Here in Vienna a woman like Elisabeth would not have been left mourning her fiancé very long. As he came in he kissed his wife's hand with a courtesy in which Elisabeth recognized a kind of pity. He did not say a word about Arnim and Rudi but said he was surprised to see how big Stephan had grown and how much he looked like his mother. Elisabeth told him the purpose of their journey and described their adventures in a tone which she tried to make as indifferent as possible. He did not

allow her to say much. "Surely," he said, turning to his wife, "the boy can stay with us!"

"Arnim's room is still unoccupied," said Louise as though there were no other rooms in the big house.

The invitation was welcome to Elisabeth, but it also frightened her a little. She knew that Stephan would be received with love in surroundings that were, after all, his own. But it would also mean that there would be no escaping from a regular correspondence with Aunt Louise, and that she would be subjected to a steady stream of letters about Rudi and Arnim. However, it would be for Stephan's good. And a look at the quiet, ageing von Strada with his silent tolerance made her a little less sensitive.

The days of fruitless search had mellowed her. Stephan's craving for freedom had already given way to a desire to settle down. He turned to her in happy surprise. She blushed and was unable to hide her own relief. She made a modest protest, but Aunt Louise had already taken charge and would tolerate no resistance.

"Will you come and live here with us in the autumn, Stephan?" she asked. He nodded with boyish gratitude, and without further hesitation Aunt Louise opened her hungry maternal heart to him. The matter was settled.

Back at Maria-Licht time weighed heavily on Stephan's hands. He also discovered that the farm was not what it used to be in the days when he could drop in any time, and when the farmer's wife would make a special cup of coffee for him. "It's just as though it were no longer our own farm," he said to Elisabeth. She agreed with a sigh.

"Why don't you read if you are bored?" she asked.

"Soon enough I'll do nothing but look at books," he said.

"I thought that was just what you wanted?"

"No doubt, but now it's vacation."

It was difficult to get him to do anything. He seemed to have one thought only, that of going to Vienna and being a student. The harvest was in full swing now, but he felt little desire to go and help. Everywhere he came across this fellow with the dragging leg who was always urging on the labourers and the maids, and hardly allowed them time for a drink or a joke.

Stephan took his bicycle and went to Klagenfurt. Soon he did this every day and his references to what he did there were of the vaguest: there might be a game of tennis or a visit to some friends. He complained that he had so little pocket money. Others were able to offer cigarettes or to treat their friends while he had always to accept and could never reciprocate. Elisabeth hastened to put this right. Was it not a proof of pride on his part? She was sure that he called once more on the Klaus family, but she thought it wiser not

to interfere. She did not want to quarrel with him before he went to Vienna, because it would make her remorseful for months. She did not even protest when he gradually acquired the habit of coming home only for dinner and for the night. If she ceased to ask where he had been, she saved him from the necessity of fibbing. A few more weeks and he would be off to Vienna, where a new world would open to him, and Klagenfurt and the Klaus family would soon be forgotten. Perhaps he was merely drawn towards the little girl because he liked to display himself in his capacity of future student.

When at last Stephan also began to miss meals, Papa became angry. He noticed little of what happened in the house and lived entirely with his own thoughts. Recently Elisabeth had found on his desk the beginning of a letter to Rudi in which he informed him, in the stiff, impersonal manner that characterized his letters, of the death of his mother. The ink was hardly dry and the letter had only just been written, but it was dated May 10th, 1915, the day on which Rudi had been killed. All this showed how much Papa was losing contact with reality. But one thing remained supremely important to him. He demanded that his son and his daughter should be punctual at meals, and that the soup should be served at the stroke of the hour. Down in the kitchen old Anna functioned exclusively as the living conscience of Mariedl, who held rather liberal notions on the subject of time. She never was sure when to put the potatoes or the vegetables on the fire. Moreover, she was expecting a baby once more and Anna's criticism often made her angry. "Now then, you old timepiece, are you trying to drive me on again!"—"And not without reason. One can never trust you." And the old timepiece usually turned out to be right. By the time it was nearly one Mariedl was all in a sweat. Ignaz held the soup-tureen to have it filled. Then he rushed upstairs with it, sounded the gong, and walked into the dining-room for his great piece of play-acting in the character of butler, leisurely and calm.

The Major knew nothing about these achievements behind the scenes. He merely looked round with threatening eyes if Stephan was not present. He sat down, red with anger, opposite the nervous and silent Elisabeth, and served himself first in an uncontrolled and greedy manner. When, by the time the sweet arrived, he heard Stephan throwing his bicycle against the wall and rushing upstairs three at a time, he crumpled his table napkin and shouted at the late-comer, trying to look innocently surprised: "Get away to your room!"

Then Stephan went to Vienna and the only thing that struck Georg was the absence of a culprit on whom he could vent his resentment. During the first week he often thought that Stephan was again late for the meal. When Elisabeth reminded him that Stephan was studying

in Vienna, he said in a naïve and shamefaced way: "Of course, I forgot." And then she felt sorry for him.

It took Elisabeth a long time before she could persuade her father to sell a small field to pay for Stephan's studies. Rudinger protested angrily but Georg surprised him by his determination. It was Elisabeth's first little triumph over the farmer. Rudinger saw too late that the old man could not be intimidated. Elisabeth tried to exploit her success by pointing out to her father that perhaps Rudinger was not entirely to be trusted, but she was compelled to give up the attempt almost at once. During his moments of absent-mindedness nothing penetrated to him, and when his head was clear he realized only too well that the farmer and his daughter hated one another. He took no notice of what each said to him about the other, and this was all that remained of his sense of justice which used to be so strong.

The news from Stephan was excellent. Aunt Louise wrote about him in her usual exalted manner. She praised him for having kept his innocence, and told of his zeal in attending lectures. She was compelled to take him with her to the theatre if she wanted him to take an evening off. She was even compelled to assure him that unless he went to the theatre occasionally he would be unable to say later that he had been a student in Vienna. Stephan's first letter confirmed Aunt Louise's news. He declared that he could have been nowhere as happy as with Aunt Louise and Uncle Felix. His studies filled him with delight, and to compensate for all the mathematics he had to study he read Schiller, Grillparzer and Shakespeare's historical dramas. A little later, shortly before the Christmas vacation, Aunt Louise's letters seemed to become less enthusiastic. She seemed to be disappointed because Stephan no longer required her chaperonage: "Vienna has really got hold of him! There are days when he comes home merely to have a meal! My husband even believes that we ought to restrain him a little. Who would have thought this a month ago! Please don't imagine there is anything wrong. He is as innocent as ever and he still does not go out in order to have fun (although at his age I think he would be fully entitled to do so) but he goes to meetings and takes part in debates about these new ideas which have got hold of him. I have an idea that at present he reads too much outside his own studies. Sometimes he comes home with piles of books and he locks himself with them in his room. The result is that he doesn't look as well as he used to. It is a good thing that the vacation will soon be here. He has just come in now and he's rushing out again. I have not even been able to exchange a word with him. Perhaps I'm merely worrying because I should so like to see a little more of him! He does so remind me of Arnim!"

Stephan no longer found time to add postscripts to Aunt Louise's letters. Once there came a request for extra pocket money. He did

not want to make unnecessary use of the generosity of Aunt Louise and Uncle Felix. He declared with an air of mystery and self-importance that he had his own reasons for this. The result was that Elisabeth looked towards the coming Christmas with a certain anxiety and nervousness. She wanted to see the boy with her own eyes.

What a Christmas it was going to be! While she was waiting rather nervously for further news from Vienna, the postman brought a letter with a French stamp. When she saw the handwriting of the address she had to lean against the wall lest she should fall.

It was a letter from Angélique!

Without warning she found herself with a letter from her sister in her hands. Angélique was alive, she had not forgotten her. Suddenly the world became something wonderful again. A warm sunny light surrounded her and her heart felt weak with happiness. Even if she had not been so profoundly religious she would have been convinced of God's kindness. She read the letter through a mist of tears: "I struggled for days with myself before I wrote. I should have preferred never to bother any of you again. But I am compelled to do it, and my only excuse is that I am acting not only for myself but for the good of my child. I am alone here with my boy. Desmond has left us here with his sister and I have no money to follow him. But I must speak to him once more. I *must*, Elisabeth! I am in a terrible situation, and you are my last hope. I know how bad the exchange is, and I am asking you for a great sacrifice. I need three hundred francs, but I swear that you'll get the money back. I realize that I have no right to ask how things are at home. You need not reply, but do send me the money, if you can still discover a trace of feeling for me!"

Elisabeth realized that this was not the moment to give way to her intense emotion. Later on she would try to visualize it all. Angélique had become the mother of a boy; her husband had left her in the lurch with her child. Later she would quietly read the letter again. When she did, she felt hurt by Angélique's ridiculous and petty pride. But now action was necessary. The money was needed and the first thing to do was to tell Papa that Stephan needed some expensive books.

She locked herself up in her room to compose a letter. At first she thought that she would only write a few words to go together with the money, but she was unable to restrict herself to this. Her heart was jubilant, and this she must show her sister even while she told her how sorry she was about her news. She mentioned the registered letters she had addressed to Switzerland and which had never been answered, but she did this only to prove that she had not forgotten her. Once more she told everything that had happened during the last years, though she had to fight against a slight suspicion that

Angélique might well have received the lost letters but preferred not to admit it. As she went on, words came more easily to her. "Meanwhile," she wrote, "Stephan is studying in Vienna. He is coming over for the Christmas vacation. What a dream it would be, Angélique, if you were here also and we could fetch him from the train together. Oh, my dear little sister, if only you would come here and bring your boy with you! I should so love to see him and to hold him in my arms. How old is he? What is his name? Oh, Angélique, I won't try to console you in a suffering which you cannot accept yourself, but I cannot forget that you have a child. What would I not give to have a child of Paul's? I have never been able to confess this to any one, not even to Rudi when he was home for the last time. You may not yet be able to enjoy to the full the wealth you possess in your child. But one day you will admit that I'm right. Herewith the money for which you ask. Write to me again if it is not enough. Write to me, my dear sister, you don't know how happy a word from you will make me. Have you heard anything in France about the plebiscite which has been held here, and which at least has brought us the certainty that we are not to be added to the new Servia? Oh, God, Angélique, what dreadful things have happened to our poor country! Do you still feel sufficiently Austrian to realize the dreadful times we are going through? I don't mean this as a reproach, and perhaps you have begun to look upon your husband's country as your own. But it must have been difficult for you at first. I understand all this so well, and perhaps the question only escaped me because in the last few days I have heard nothing else talked about. The bells are ringing throughout Austria. There is so much misery in the whole world that people might just as well stop loving their country and looking at others as though they were enemies. If we had won the war I don't think we would have treated France differently from the way we are being treated, and the injustice of it would be just as intolerable to me. I hope there are French people who feel this too. But why am I talking about all this; there is no need to convince you that we did not want the war, not we, nor Rudi, nor Paul, and the hundreds of thousands of others who fell. Kiss your French boy from his Austrian aunt and tell him that I am already as fond of him as if I had seen him. I am so infinitely happy that you have come back to me and that I have once more a little sister. Do reply soon, Angélique, don't keep me waiting!"

A reply came at once. It was a little hesitant and shamefaced. Angélique obviously found it difficult to comment upon all the sad things that had happened since her flight from Maria-Licht. No doubt she had thought much less of home during all these years than Elisabeth had supposed. She wrote that she thought it dreadful that Rudi and Paul had been killed, but she expressed herself in a manner

suggesting that the information had not entirely penetrated to her. Apparently at the moment nothing was real to her except the question whether she could recapture her husband. She had met him in Switzerland, whence she now wrote. He was willing to support her financially provided she agreed to a divorce. But this she had refused. She swore to Elisabeth that she had never seen the letters of the previous year.

"Jules opened all my correspondence. He was terribly jealous in those days. I suppose your letter was written in German and therefore he could not read it. I think he must simply have torn it up. He did not want me to have any contact with home and he wanted me to remain completely dependent on him. It is also possible that he put the envelope in his pocket and forgot all about it. When he was working he could never think of anything else. Naturally during the war there was much less chance of giving concerts and this gave him more opportunity for composing. Oh, if you knew what marvellous things he has done! All this is over now, because the woman who turned his head wants him to travel the world with her as a soloist. And so she will be able to keep him away from me. I admit I have had difficult years with him, but I am not complaining. They were marvellous years and I have always known that I need expect no gratitude from him. Men with a talent as great as his are perhaps a little selfish and take whatever is offered to them. I feel no resentment. As far as she is concerned, I have one bitter consolation. Soon enough she will notice that she will never hold him entirely. The violin is his one eternal love and music is the only thing that absorbs him entirely. I knew it beforehand, that evening in Vienna, but it has not prevented my following him even to the gates of Hell. I could not possibly describe what I have been through during those four years because I was an Austrian. Even Jules himself was often unkind. But if I were asked to go through it all again, I would, if I could only have him back. But now it is all over."

She also wrote that she would love to accept Elisabeth's invitation to come to Maria-Licht at Christmas. The mere thought stirred up strange feelings in her. It still appeared so incomprehensible, and she was a little frightened at the thought of seeing all those faces from her former life. Was Ignaz still there? And Anna? And Brigitte? Right, in a few days' time, she would step on the train. She had money enough left. She had no photos to send, but Elisabeth would see soon enough after whom her boy took. His name was Jacques. Elisabeth was overwhelmed with joy. She wondered how she ought to break the news to her father. Would not the wisest thing be to present him unprepared with a *fait accompli*? She could not believe that he would be obdurate when his lost daughter and her little son appeared before him. But, on the other hand, it was to be feared that

the shock would be too much for him and might do him harm. The day before Angélique's arrival she was no longer able to keep the great news to herself. At table she said: "Papa, there's a letter. It's a letter from Angélique. . . ."

He looked up from his plate in confusion. Then surprise appeared on his face. Had he taken in what she said? He did not answer.

"You remember Angélique, don't you?" Elisabeth asked with beating heart. He nodded slowly but he still gave no reply.

"She's very unhappy, Papa. We must take her back here with us at home."

"No," he said. And suddenly she saw that he was struggling against a great emotion. "No, it cannot be!" Tears sprang into Elisabeth's eyes. "I've already told her that she could come." He made an angry gesture of refusal. "No, no. I won't have her here! If she's unhappy it's only what she deserves. If Rudi were alive I wouldn't mind. But now I won't see her any more. Not as things are now!"

"But will you at least read her letter, Papa! Her husband has left her. She is alone with her son. She has a son!"

"Enough!" he shouted suddenly, and his voice went over into a falsetto. He banged the table so hard that the glasses tinkled and Ignaz rushed in.

In the presence of his frightened servant he tried to go on eating, but he was unable to bring the spoon to his mouth with his trembling hand. As Elisabeth remained silent, unable to utter another word, he seemed to grow a little calmer. After a while it was impossible to see whether he was still thinking about the affair. There was a sweet of stewed fruit of which he was particularly fond. He helped himself with his usual greed and suddenly he asked when Stephan was coming for his vacation. She had to repeat her answer several times: "At Christmas, Papa." It seemed to surprise him.

After lunch he rose with difficulty, though he never allowed himself to be assisted. He had acquired the habit of taking a siesta and his rest became longer every day. Now that it was winter it was dark when he woke up and he was never quite sure whether it was morning or evening. He always asked Mariédl whether the morning paper was on his table. Anyhow he did not look at it any longer and Elisabeth wondered whether she ought not to stop the subscription, which seemed a waste of money. He kept reading a pile of newspapers from the first year of the war, and especially the news from the front. He had drawn a number of sketches in the margin. With one of these papers in his hand he sometimes stood for a long time in front of a map staring at the little flags that marked the front line.

That evening and the following morning he did not mention Angélique. Had he entirely forgotten her, or had he decided to accept

her return after his protest? Elisabeth arrived at the station an hour before the time. At last the train steamed slowly in, and among the people who hurried towards the exit she saw a slim lady in dark clothes and a little boy in a sailor suit, waiting near a pile of luggage. She rushed towards her sister and clasped her in her arms. "Angélique!" Angélique returned her kiss as though she felt shy among all the people on the platform. She looked at her elder sister with some hesitation, then she smiled: "Thank you for having come to fetch me." Elisabeth was too nervous to say anything. Angélique had become an elegant woman. Beneath the deceptive freshness of her make-up she looked tired and ill. She was dressed with a refined simplicity. Elisabeth herself had taken extra care of her appearance, but she noticed the contrast between herself and the urban elegance of her sister. The luggage for which Angélique called a porter was also luxurious, and it seemed incredible that a few hundred francs could have made such a difference to her. The little boy was four and in his long navy-blue trousers he looked very slender. His large brown eyes burned in his pale little face. They reminded Elisabeth of someone else. He took off his beret very politely and displayed a wealth of brown curly hair. "Bonjour, Madame!" he said in his shrill voice while his Aunt Elisabeth lifted him up and pressed him on her heart. She remembered that this was exactly the way in which, years ago, the first Stephan had greeted their French governess. She told this to Angélique as soon as they were in the carriage. Angélique nodded and said meditatively: "Yes, when I heard Desmond in Vienna for the first time, he reminded me at once of Stephan."

Elisabeth wondered. Was Angélique trying to make herself believe that the child owed this remarkable resemblance with her twin brother to his father and not to herself? Little Jacques looked at his mother in surprise because she was speaking words he could not understand.

"Are we going to see Papa to-day, Mama?" he asked in French. Elisabeth stroked his hair sadly. Angélique replied in the language which seemed easier to her than German: "But no, darling, surely you remember that Papa is giving concerts in Italy."

Ignaz could not help looking back from the box. A moment ago he had stepped towards Angélique with genuine feelings of joy. Perhaps he hoped that she still remembered that one evening when she had danced with him in the meadow. But she took away all his self-confidence by the dignity she had acquired and by her utter indifference. Now she was staring meditatively through the window. Perhaps she wanted to avoid the memories called up by all the things she saw, and she asked her boy how he liked all these woods in which his mama had played when she was a girl. "And how do you like it

yourself?" Elisabeth asked quickly. "Will you be able to bear it?"—"I haven't so much choice," replied Angélique with an attempt at humour that sounded a little bitter. Elisabeth tried to hide her disappointment. She regretted her imprudent question. She would make many mistakes yet if her sister remained so touchy. "Anyhow," she added, "it will be excellent for your boy out here." Angélique understood. She meant to imply in a tactful way that the child did not look well. She looked at him almost with displeasure, and arranged his collar. Elisabeth had nothing more to say. Suddenly she had the oppressive feeling that Angélique was closer to her while they were merely corresponding. Her anxiety about the forthcoming interview between her father and her sister returned. There was no hope that Angélique would fall round his neck like a remorseful child and beg him to forgive her. Elisabeth was afraid of her pride. What if Angélique were to turn round suddenly and walk away?

Everything happened in a manner Elisabeth could not have foreseen. Angélique was utterly self-possessed as she entered the old castle. She showed no trace of fear. She answered old Anna's tearful greetings with indifference and with a set determination not to give way to sentimentality. Still in this frame of mind she entered the dining-room where, in a few moments, the meeting with her father would take place. She put her arms round her boy, who leaned against her shyly but full of curiosity and looked with large eyes at the door through which the old gentleman was just coming in. "Good-day, Papa," said Angélique very quietly without even holding her hand out to him. He turned towards her and went red. Then he went to his usual place at table and it looked for a moment as though he would simply ignore her. But something unexpected happened. Before he sat down he made a clumsy gesture with his hand, inviting her to sit down. Angélique took her place in her old chair, and little Jacques sat down between them. He was already busily tying his table napkin round his neck while he looked on with interest as Mama served the soup. Georg had suddenly ceased to be the centre of the table. Elisabeth did not dare talk either to her father or to her sister. She addressed herself to her little nephew and praised him for the neat manner in which he held his spoon and ate without spilling.

"I am very fond of soup," he declared, and Elisabeth could not help looking at her father in order to try to discover what he thought of this perky little guest. The Major looked fixedly down at his plate. Was he feeling uncomfortable? Elisabeth would not have imagined such a thing was possible. But Angélique, after an absence of six years, had apparently been confident all along that provided she met him calmly and with the self-possession of a woman of the world, he would be too shy to be unpleasant. Her clothes, her delicate perfume, especially her reserve, had turned his daughter into a lady

towards whom he was bound to observe a certain elementary courtesy. From the first day he was secretly afraid of Angélique. He had never been afraid of Elisabeth, to whom he was used.

Little Jacques chattered on unconcerned, and every word that dropped from his lips was received like an oracle. Elisabeth wondered whether the happy light that was cast over the old dwelling would not, in the end, penetrate into Papa's heart and liberate him from the strain that held him rigid. One day Georg involuntarily cast a sideways glance in the direction of his young neighbour. The child was frightened and sprang towards his mother. "Is the old gentleman angry with me?" he asked.

"Of course not," said Angélique, wiping his mouth with his table napkin: "He's your grandpapa."

The presence of the child made these daily meetings infinitely easier. Without him they would have been truly unbearable. Both sisters were able to busy themselves with him and to converse about him. Georg sat there seemingly present only in body. He still refused to talk, but gradually a change came over him. When he looked at the little boy something protecting and tender crept into his stern glance. Anyhow, he seemed determined never again to frighten the child. And after a week a greater miracle still took place. Georg had been accustomed to help himself first at table, indifferent to the contemptuous way in which Angélique looked at him while he continued this old habit. But one day, without saying anything, he took the plate of his grandson and filled it before helping himself. This became at once the rule, and Jacques, proud of his victory over this dangerous old man, held out his plate as though it were the most natural thing in the world. The first time this happened, Elisabeth had to turn away quickly in order to hide her tears. She wondered whether her father had observed the striking likeness which had been obvious to her from the beginning. No, he was no longer able to notice such things. By now he had probably already forgotten that Rudi was not the first son he had lost.

Even if Georg had remembered any French he could never have brought himself to speak this language to his grandson. But the child was making astounding progress in German, and one day he surprised the Major by calling him *Grosspapa*. Anna Krone had taught him this word. She would have liked to keep him in her kitchen all day long. But this was impossible because Jacques had many other important occupations. He had to go on his daily round of inspection over the farm, he had to be present when the cattle and the horses were being fed, and he had to visit the chicken runs to make sure that the eggs had been collected. He was the only one who felt as much at home in the farm as in the castle, and for his sake the maids were ready to brave Rudinger and to risk a gruff reprimand.

Anna went to see Magdalena Eisengruber. She told her how much the child resembled the first Stephan. "It's Stephan himself, as true as I'm alive!" she said. She had been resigned to her fate for a number of years, but now she felt rebellious against the stupid and cruel blow which had deprived her so early of her husband: "Why isn't Krone alive, to see it with his own eyes! If he had known that Stephan was going to come back to us, he would certainly have looked out more carefully that night and he would have heard the train behind him!"

Sometimes, when Georg withdrew into solitude after the evening meal, Angélique sat down at the piano. All these years she had neglected her violin, but she had learnt to play the piano surprisingly well. She did not mind if Elisabeth put the child to bed. Had she not kissed him good-night already when they got up from table? She tried to play by heart various compositions of her husband's. Did she rejoice in this brief solitude which gave her an opportunity to lose herself in memories, or did she perhaps want to excite Elisabeth's curiosity about this music? As soon as her sister came back she stopped playing and was haughty and distant as usual. But one day Elisabeth told her how much she liked what Angélique was playing, although she had only heard it through the door. From this moment Angélique opened her heart and continued to play vigorously when her sister was present. One evening she even began to talk about her life in Venice in the early days of her marriage. She told how she had lived in a dream with Desmond in the town of gondolas and music, while the world was at war and no one talked about anything else. Perhaps by now she was idealizing this period. Elisabeth observed her secretly and noticed how much loneliness and sorrow there lay between those Venetian days of selfish and careless enjoyment of the moment. As soon as Angélique noticed the slightest trace of pity she became silent and went to bed. She wanted to be envied, not pitied. And yet Elisabeth envied her so much, but for an entirely different reason, for a reason which hardly existed in the eyes of Angélique.

Stephan was expected home in a few days' time and it was decided that Angélique would go to meet him at the train. The boy had not yet heard about her return. This kind of surprise did not thrill Angélique in the least, but she felt that she might give this pleasure to her elder sister. Besides, she wished to take the opportunity of having her hair done at Klagenfurt and to buy Jacques a warm suit which Elisabeth wanted to give him. Of course she was rather curious to know how her brother, whom she remembered as a thirteen-year-old boy, was looking now that he was a student.

The only thing Elisabeth noticed was that he had grown very thin

and that his eyes were curiously tired. It made her forget the whole surprise she had prepared for her brother. "Stephan, what's the matter with you?" He was unable to answer, but looked in dumb surprise at Angélique, who stood a few paces away and asked him in an amused voice: "Don't you recognize me?"

He nodded. Although it was bitterly cold he felt so awkward that perspiration appeared on his face. He wondered whether he ought to kiss her; then put down his suitcase in order to do so. Angélique allowed herself to be kissed on the cheek, but warned him not to upset her coiffure because so much care had just been bestowed upon it. She was clearly doing her best to make the meeting as easy as possible for the young man, and she succeeded in bringing the first shy smile on his face.

Elisabeth took upon herself to tell him in what appeared to her the most suitable way what had brought his sister back. But Angélique robbed the occasion of every dramatic element by teasing him; she said that he must feel very dignified now that he was a student, and asked him whether he had a sweetheart in Vienna. Was it because of that he looked so tired? But her jokes did not seem to amuse him. With averted face he said that he had been through many experiences in Vienna, and that he usually went to bed very late. Did he say this merely in order to acquire more importance in Angélique's eyes?

In the evening when she was alone with him, Elisabeth heard a little more. He had been taken by other students to political meetings which had turned him into a convinced Communist. His story was rather confused and interspersed with arguments in which he tried to prove to his sister that the world was wrongly organized. The republic had not destroyed any of the old evils. The rich were still living on the blood of the poor. The manufacturers of war materials, the army contractors, had sent the people to the slaughter for four years, and had allowed millions to bleed to death in the trenches in order to fill their pockets. Instead of getting their deserved reward, that of hanging from the nearest street lamp, these executioners still drove in their cars without bothering particularly about the republic, which provided them with as sound an income as had the empire. At first Stephan had been incredulous and even indignant. He wanted to get on his feet and shout: "It's a lie! A few people may have behaved like that, but there are many rich people who are perfectly decent!" But then the speaker began to produce masses of facts and figures, and he showed lantern slides of frightful slums where dwelt the hungry workers of Europe's main coal and industrial areas. Then he showed the villas, the palaces, the pleasure yachts of mine owners and manufacturers. He argued that all these capitalists preferred not to think too seriously about life, lest they should remember the blood and the tears with which their wealth had been bought. The speaker

read statistics about the frightful mortality in some industries, which affected even the children who were compelled to work in them. Gradually Stephan became very quiet: he felt ashamed of the good clothes he was wearing and of his non-proletarian origin. One day a friend of his who wrote descriptive articles for a Communist paper piloted him through the worst parts of Vienna. From that day Stephan felt a kind of nausea when he climbed the marble steps of the von Stradas' house. He began to read books on politics and economics which he borrowed from his friend, and finally he joined the Communist Party. He proudly displayed the party badge beneath the lapel of his coat.

At first Elisabeth listened to him with astonishment and with incredulity. But then she began to grow angry. Of course she had no doubt that there was much amiss in the organization of the world, but would those reformers to whom Stephan had been listening be able to set things right? It irritated her to hear him throwing about all these clichés intended for the masses. How could he be such a defenceless tool in the hands of his new friends? The worst of it was that Stephan seemed to feel ashamed of his good ancient family name. What did he think there would be left of him if he gave up his name?

She wanted to explain her reactions to Stephan's stories, but she was afraid that if she allowed herself to be too explicit, too sharp, she would merely increase the distance there was already between them. And perhaps she took these things too seriously. After all, she was older than Stephan and she ought to be wise enough not to be upset by his immature notions. If he was so easily influenced, it would be better for her to get hold of him, to use his weakness, and to guide him imperceptibly away from dangerous pitfalls. If she acted like one in authority she might easily drive him to do something irresponsible. She therefore led him to talk uninterruptedly till he had poured out all the things that had been impressed upon him. Then she answered that she wanted first of all to assimilate the things he had told her. Before she made up her mind she would like to read some of these books he had borrowed from his friends. Would it not be possible for her to meet some of these young men? What if he tried to get one or two of them to spend a week of their vacation at Maria-Licht?

He looked at her a little self-consciously and said: "They would never consent to come here." His voice sounded as though this declaration was something to be proud of.

"Why not?" asked Elisabeth. He said nothing, and she thought that she understood what he meant.

"Why not admit at once that you feel ashamed yourself because you're here with us?" He blushed, and did not find a reply at once. "No," he muttered at last, somewhat awkwardly, "but in Vienna, in

that splendid house, when they see me go in . . . Yes, there I do feel ashamed."

"Oh, when they see you go home to the von Stradas!"

"I feel ashamed most of all because I have to hide from Aunt Louise and Uncle Felix what I feel and think. Besides, they would never understand," he added hastily. "And I don't want them to laugh at me!" He drew a deep breath. "Maybe they've noticed something as it is. It began when I refused to accept any more money from Aunt Louise. I don't think I want to stay with her any longer. I don't want to live in a marble palace while my friends stay in little attic rooms. I've brought everything with me for the vacation, even my books. I shan't have to go for them later."

Elisabeth wondered what she ought to do. She could not force him to live with the von Stradas, but what was she to do with him? Was it right to let him return to Vienna if, instead of studying, he dabbled in politics, and perhaps even in politics of a dangerous kind? He had become, as he called it, "a member of the party." Was the wisest course to take it all with a dose of irony? Were all these emotions and decisions merely an unavoidable stage in his evolution towards manhood? If so, he should be allowed to rage and scold until he grew tired, and until he had grown beyond this stage. He was bound to discover in the long run that by education and tradition he belonged here. Vienna and his new freedom had gone to his head. Therefore she was left with two problems only: Stephan's future lodgings in Vienna and the letter in which she would have to apologize to the von Stradas.

At last she broke her silence and said that it was at any rate his duty to write himself to Aunt Louise and to explain why he could not return to her after the vacation. She would add a word to his letter. Stephan was glad to have won his sister over so easily. After the vacation he could return in triumph to his friends. He went up to his room at once and drew up a letter, and came down like a schoolboy half an hour later to show it to his sister. To his amazement she tore up the letter before his eyes. Trembling with anger, she asked him why he had not had the courage to write the truth.

"I thought you wouldn't like it," he said apologetically.

"And supposing I did not approve, what then? I don't know whether, as a member of your party, you are allowed to tell lies, but as long as your signature is von Weygand such a letter is unworthy of you."

He sat down meekly and began at once to write a second letter in her presence. It sounded incredibly thin and unconvincing. He showed this letter to her also, although she had not asked him to do so. Ought she to be glad, she wondered, and take this as a proof

of confidence, or was it merely due to a lack of inner conviction? Could he not even go astray with determination?

She added a postscript: "Dear Aunt Louise, what you will just have read is bound not only to amaze you but to hurt you considerably. Perhaps you will be able to forgive Stephan if you remember how young and inexperienced he is. All I can add is the one thing which he forgot to write: the expression of our deep gratitude for all you have done."

A few days later a reply arrived from Vienna. Louise von Strada showed herself hardly less unbalanced than Stephan. And then Stephan sprang another surprise: he declared that he wanted to change his studies. He had apparently not had the courage to confess this before. Now his ideal seemed to be to become a medical doctor, because his best friend was studying medicine, and because it was the only study his conscience allowed him to undertake. Elisabeth was almost in despair. What would the boy want to do six months hence? What would be the subject taken by whoever might be his best friend then? And where could the money be found to pay for all this? The cost of living kept rising most unaccountably. It is true that the income from the farm also rose, but not in the same proportion. The new government regulated the price of wheat and exports of timber had been stopped. There was no point in saving money, because within a few days it lost half its value. Life threatened to become even more uncertain than during the Great War. Five or six years of study in Vienna would be absolutely beyond the family means. Moreover they would now have to do without the assistance of the von Stradas. She told this to Stephan, but he had his answer ready. Degrees and academic titles would soon be without any value. The only thing that mattered would be the knowledge one had acquired. There would probably soon be a new social regime and then fees would be abolished and books, board and lodging would be provided to students free of charge. His friends rejoiced at the inflation which was the prelude to bankruptcy and the end of capitalism, not only in Austria and in Germany but also in the victorious countries.

Elisabeth had not much understanding of money matters, but she knew that many people who had hoped to live on a small income or a little pension, the meagre fruit of an active life, were being reduced to abject poverty and humiliation. Inflation seemed to her a cowardly betrayal of these defenceless people; it shocked her so much that she could not believe anything could be said in favour of it. No, this abominable inflation was not the bankruptcy of capitalism; it was the bankruptcy of good faith and of decency. The new state which might arise from it filled her in anticipation with loathing and contempt.

However, if the whole world was rushing towards the abyss it did not matter much whether there remained any nobility or not, whether Stephan joined the Communist Party, and whether he wanted to change his studies every half-year. Perhaps the only reason that made her want Stephan to become an architect was that Rudi had advised it. Oh, why was Rudi no longer alive? Why was Paul not with her to look after Stephan? Why had they died, if the fatherland for which they had sacrificed themselves surrendered so dishonourably now? Again Elisabeth felt that she had been deceived, dreadfully deceived. But she was not rebellious by nature: she knew that complaints would not help her. She continued to fight, but with a feeling that fate was stronger than she.

She tried to get support from Father Aigner, her only remaining friend. Unhappily he was ill and in bed. He could not possibly come over to Maria-Licht to have a talk with Stephan, and the young man who, as a Communist, had given up religion, refused to go and call at the priest's house. Father Aigner advised Elisabeth to give way and allow Stephan to change his studies. After all, the desire to become a physician was due to an idealistic tendency in him. It was better that during the critical years ahead he should have a real interest that would protect him up to a point against dangerous outside influences. The great tragic aspects of the study he was now going to undertake might bring him to himself. Elisabeth looked rigidly in front of her and in the end she agreed.

Elisabeth noticed with a certain envy that Stephan confided in Angélique much more than in her. More than once Angélique pleaded for him in an amused and light-hearted way. It was as though she could not possibly take in the seriousness of anything. Perhaps it was because her husband systematically refused to answer the many letters she kept writing to him. If her own life was ruined, the universal destruction of the world around her would almost be a consolation. Sometimes she laughed because her brother considered it necessary to become a Communist. It seemed to her the play of a foolish child. But she never made merry at his expense when he was present: she liked to egg him on because she enjoyed the comical display of manhood and wisdom to which he treated her. She listened to him as though she were in complete agreement, and told him of the spread of Communism in the French trenches shortly before the end of the war. Military defeat, she said, would have given France the liberation which it was now bringing to Austria.

The disruptive character of those days affected her like a gently exciting narcotic. Whenever she came back from Klagenfurt she discussed the giddy rise of foreign currencies and quietly enjoyed the terror her stories caused Elisabeth. The number of crowns one had to pay for a single dollar was incredible. She read out articles from

a paper she had brought in the street protesting against the unscrupulous speculators who hurried on Austria's downfall. But her tone betrayed a secret admiration for the people whom no scruples deflected from their course. Here were men who had the courage to trample current morality underfoot. They were able to buy palaces and estates under the eyes of the envious, and to drink champagne with their lovely mistresses. She wished she were clever enough to make money, whatever the method might be. It hurt her pride to be living here at her father's expense, and she would have liked to return to her sister the money she had borrowed for her journey to Switzerland. But would this ever be possible? The few hundred francs which had not yet seemed so much in those days now represented a fantastic sum if reckoned in Austrian currency. Desmond could so easily have sent a little foreign money for her to buy decent clothes. At the cost of a few Swiss francs he could have played the part of a benefactor. But like every artist he had no morality. As long as he was in love with a woman he was prepared to spend his last centime on her, but once his feelings changed he forgot all about her. Of course Angélique realized that if she were to give her husband his freedom, he would be ready to help her at once.

She offered to accompany Stephan to Vienna in order to find a room for him. Elisabeth realized that Angélique would enjoy the trip, and as she remembered how she had loathed roaming through Vienna in search of a room and witnessing the moral degeneration and the open misery that were displayed in the big city, she gladly accepted her sister's suggestion. Angélique excitedly packed her trunk and felt no qualms in entrusting little Jacques to her sister for the time of her absence.

Jacques did not appear to mind being left with his aunt. He followed her everywhere. He was still small, but somehow he seemed already able to console her in her troubles. Looking after him made her forget her cares. Elisabeth had been sorry for him from the beginning because his father had left him, but now she noticed that he hardly mentioned his mother once she had gone. To his great delight she allowed him to walk about in old clothes that had once belonged to the second Stephan. The child seemed glad to get out of the pretty suit in which his mother dressed him, but he suddenly thought of his mother and asked Elisabeth whether she would not think it wrong of him to wear these old clothes. "To-day I am your mother," said Elisabeth, and these words gave her a strange emotion. Jacques considered her answer entirely convincing and did not mention his mother again.

While looking for the old clothes she found the leaden soldiers with which Rudi used to play as a child. These little parade-soldiers in their bright-red coats and their white trousers did not remind one of

rough and sanguinary warfare. They recalled the time of her childhood, before death had cast his shadow over Maria-Licht. Apparently Jacques had never yet played with soldiers. They excited him, and soon he developed a remarkable capacity for drawing them up in battle array. At the most exciting moment of the battle the Major happened to walk into the room. He stopped for a moment and looked on with large, astonished eyes. Who could tell what the little boy who was playing on the ground with leaden soldiers reminded him of? He walked away again, but his grey moustache trembled and there was moisture in his eyes.

Presently Elisabeth produced a game of draughts from the cupboard and sat down with her little nephew to teach him the rules. He was intelligent and understood them at once. From that moment he kept asking her to play with him. As often as she could spare half an hour she satisfied his wish, but one day when he came in again she said almost before she realized what she was saying: "You'd better ask your Grandfather; he has more time than your Aunt." He hesitated and looked at her with surprise: "Won't Grosspapa be angry?"

In her infinite maternal tenderness Elisabeth could not imagine for a moment that her father would be able to resist the appeal from these large brown eyes. She even wondered why she had not thought of it earlier. His grandfather was free all day long. So she gave Jacques an encouraging nod and opened the door of her father's study for him. Timidly, holding the large board before him in his arms that were almost too small to go round it, he walked in.

She closed the door very softly and waited behind it with beating heart. As the little boy did not come out, her face gradually resolved into a happy smile. She hurried on with her work and did not venture to look into the study. She was sure that in the end she would hear precisely how grandfather and grandson had got on with their game. The whole afternoon she had a quiet feeling of happiness and in the evening at dinner it was as though her father too had spent a pleasant day. He followed every movement of the child with eyes full of tenderness, and when Jacques had finished his sweet he signalled to her to give him another helping. And suddenly there came over her a strange feeling, which was no doubt rather selfish. She thought how much better it would be if she could be left alone with Papa and the child while Angélique remained in Vienna, which she liked so much better in any case.

Angélique stayed away a full week. She came back without showing the slightest sign of fatigue. The big city had obviously done her good. She had bought herself an elegant tailor-made suit and a hat that matched it. Elisabeth thought that she must have stayed in very

cheap lodgings in order to save enough to buy this from her modest travel expenses. She hastened to explain that it was a bargain, and in her excitement she forgot to greet her son. Only when they were in the carriage did she feel a sudden movement of maternal tenderness. She hugged him and told him that there was a little boat for him in her trunk.

She talked with nervous excitement about her adventures in Vienna. In order to please Stephan she had accompanied him to a meeting, where she discovered that she herself had Communist inclinations, though of a more moderate nature. She allowed Stephan to introduce some of his friends to her, and they seemed to have much less class hatred than one might have imagined. One of them, the medical student who was Stephan's special friend, had been so little logical in his Communism that he fell in love with her although she did not belong to the party, and she found the situation so piquant that she allowed him to flirt a little with her. It rather felt like flirting with a very young priest who had not yet grown hardened to clerical life. When she noticed that Elisabeth made no comment, Angélique broke off her story rather awkwardly and began to talk to the child.

The following day the post brought a letter from Vienna. "I say, what am I to do now?" said Angélique, looking a little amused and a little worried at the same time. "He absolutely wants to get invited here!"

"I thought that it was against their principles to accept an invitation to a castle," said Elisabeth, trying to conceal her indignation at Angélique's conduct.

"Oh, good! That's what I'll tell him!" said Angélique. Elisabeth walked away, but when she reached the door she turned towards her sister. "Why do you allow yourself to play such a game?"

"Why?" Angélique drew up her eyebrows in her characteristic manner. "Didn't I tell you? Because I think it piquant."

"Piquant? With a boy of nineteen?" Elisabeth did not want to be unpleasant, and she felt sorry as soon as she had spoken. "I really didn't mean to hurt you," she added, "it's only that I can't understand how, in your circumstances . . .!"

"Even in my circumstances I can't always be as good and as reasonable as you are from morning to night," said her sister in a tone of half-suppressed fury.

Tears sprang into Elisabeth's eyes. "I am not always good and reasonable myself," she said, defending herself with a feeling of lassitude. "I have my inner struggles like anybody else. And I didn't mean to criticise you. I have no right to. But you come and tell me this while I know perfectly well that as a matter of fact all you're longing for is to be once more with your husband. You're still fond of him!"

Angélique went pale. "Granted. But even if it's all as you say, have I not the right to consider myself free while he is travelling through Italy with someone else? If he's enjoying himself at this moment, I don't wish to mourn for him."

Elisabeth realized how mistaken she was to judge by the outward conduct of her sister. "Do forgive me, Angélique," she begged and she kissed her sister, who held out her cheek though without returning her kiss.

After this conversation Elisabeth swore that henceforth she would keep to herself any remark or criticism she might feel tempted to make. Besides Angélique seemed already bored with her new adventure. She did not answer the letter of Stephan's friend. A second letter arrived and then a despairing telegram. She tore it up with a cold smile on her lips and looked at her sister in a sardonic fashion. Anyhow, she had found something else to think about.

Young Freiherr von Hagel, the heir of their former neighbour, called on them unexpectedly. It was his first visit since the war. At the back of his head there was a dreadful scar which showed that he had only escaped death by a narrow margin. He talked amusingly about the time when he was a prisoner of war in France, and he exchanged jokes with Angélique in the French patois which he had learned from his guards. He had been in the air force, and at first he was at the English front. Then he was moved farther along the line, and during a reconnoitring flight he was wounded and crashed behind the enemy lines. There followed nearly three years of imprisonment, during which he made four fruitless attempts to escape. It was owing to this intense desire for freedom that he returned so late to his own country. He did not want to retire at once to the solitude of his Carinthian forest and stayed for some time in Berlin to discover whether any of his war companions were still alive and whether he might not help wring the neck of the republic which he hated. He did not mind a republic, but it should not have come as the result of a defeat. But he was not in time to take part in the Kapp Putsch. Otherwise he and his friends would have shown the accursed Communists and those French bullies that there still was a Germany. He had been given a few decorations in the course of the war, but in present circumstances he felt no wish to wear them. His manly voice and his obvious strength of character impressed Angélique. She felt that this embittered man still thirsted for adventure, and she tried to impress him. But she was compelled to notice that he seemed interested in Elisabeth only. His restless, unsatisfied nature was attracted by her pure calm. Did not Elisabeth notice it?

"What do you think of him?" asked Angélique after he had gone. Something in her voice struck Elisabeth. "It would be rather pleasant

to have him as a neighbour," she said, "but I don't think he would be able to stick it long in this part of the world. Didn't you hear what he said just as he left? He intends to keep his agent, who has managed his estate so well during his long absence, and he intends to come for a few days once or twice every month in order to rest or to do a little shooting. The remainder of the time he's going to spend in his rooms in Vienna."

Elisabeth noticed that she had allowed her attention to wander during the visit. She saw that Angélique did her best to please their visitor, and she asked herself whether it would not be a good thing if von Hagel were to propose to her. They would be neighbours then. "But what did you think of him?" she asked, in order to find out a little more. She was startled at the hostility of Angélique's reply: "Does it matter what I think of him when he has eyes only for you?"

"For me?"

"If you haven't discovered that, I give you up. You're a hopeless case!" Elisabeth blushed and made a helpless gesture. Angélique's ever-recurring references to her feminine instinct humiliated her. No, it was genuine that she had not noticed that Freiherr von Hagel was paying special attention to her. She was not prepared for such a thing, probably because his attentions would leave her completely indifferent. Since the death of Paul not a single man had interested her. Anyhow, Angélique was surely mistaken. She often imagined things. She wanted to capture his attention for herself.

Von Hagel called again on the following Sunday, and Elisabeth felt thoroughly uncomfortable. She had the impression that her sister was continually observing her. At last this made her feel so nervous that she rose and excused herself, saying that she had to go and give some orders in the kitchen. She stayed away as long as she could, and when she came back she noticed at once that Angélique had made good use of the last half-hour. Her face aglow with excitement and pleasure she announced: "To-morrow I'm going to Vienna with Freiherr von Hagel! You know I've got to go soon anyhow for those frocks!" Elisabeth remembered nothing about any frocks, but she had at any rate enough feminine instinct not to contradict her sister.

"Yes, we shall be able to travel together; I had not hoped to have such pleasant company," said von Hagel. Elisabeth turned away to take a decanter from the sideboard. She did not wish to understand or to pass judgment. One thought only hammered in her brain: It's not my concern, every one must decide what he does for himself. She also tried to avoid looking at Angélique, who held little Jacques affectionately in her arm. The child was leaning against her knee and looked with fascinated interest at the stranger.

During dinner all details for the journey were settled. It was as

though her presence made von Hagel feel awkward. Or was there less enthusiasm in his voice than when he had first spoken about the trip? After he had left she was unable to hold back one question from her sister: "Tell me just this, Angélique: did he really suggest it without being prompted?"

Angélique could easily have told a lie, but she preferred to be cynical: "Sometimes it's necessary to say a thing which a man has already in his heart."

"As long as he does not notice that one is saying it before he says it himself," was Elisabeth's comment.

"You may trust me for that," said Angélique. "Anyhow I promise you one thing. If, when we are back from Vienna, he still looks at you more than at me, I shall never go there with him again!"

Elisabeth was upset and made no comment. The game her sister was playing seemed so contemptible; she felt convinced Angélique would bitterly regret it one day. A moment ago it had sounded as though von Hagel were treating her in a rather off-hand manner. But at the same time she realized how much more deftly Angélique handled situations like this. Compared with her she sometimes felt like an old spinster, although she was only twenty-eight. The atmosphere of worldliness which Angélique had brought to the castle sometimes made Elisabeth restless and unhappy. If her sister had not come back she might have continued to live with her memories of Paul, but now she was beginning to feel as though life were passing her by. But no, she could not possibly envy her sister's little adventure with Freiherr von Hagel.

On the Monday morning he came to fetch Angélique and they left together. The staff must have had their own views on this journey, but Elisabeth was confident at any rate that no one would dare comment upon the incident in her hearing. Papa asked no questions. He probably was hardly aware of Angélique's absence. All he wanted was that little Jacques should stay with him.

Old Eisengruber died unexpectedly during the week Angélique was away. He had become very difficult of late, and in the end he did not deign even to growl at his wife. Magdalena came in to bring him a cup of coffee and found him in his chair, his chin resting on his chest. He might have been dead for more than an hour. Just before she had left him she heard Rudinger outside shouting angrily at one of the farm hands: "Yes, maybe the previous farmer allowed you to do that kind of thing, but while I'm here I won't have this place turned into a pigsty!" As old Eisengruber heard these words, such a queer look came over his face.

Elisabeth sent a telegram to Toni. He appeared just in time to support his old mother in her difficult journey to the churchyard.

Everybody who could be spared from the farm and from the castle followed the procession. The Major was driven to the church, and once there, feeling the eyes of the people upon him, he walked rigid and absolutely straight, presenting outwardly the image of an ideally preserved octogenarian. But did he even realize whom he was helping to bury? When he entered the churchyard he took a few steps in the wrong direction, and while the coffin was lowered, his empty glance wandered away to where his wife and the first Stephan lay buried under the snow. Perhaps he vaguely realized that he had not visited them for a long, long time.

Rudinger felt morally compelled to be present at the funeral. He put on his Sunday suit, but when he came up to the dead man's son with all the others in order to express his condolences, Toni looked through him as though he had not been there, and held out his hand to the next man in the row. Toni looked tired and unwell. His eyes had something fevered and unsatisfied. It was as though all joy had left him long ago. Magdalena cried not only because of her husband but also because of her son whom the town had taken from her and who seemed unable to find the right words to console her.

Soon after his arrival, and even before the funeral, Toni called at the castle, and at once Elisabeth noticed the depressed and apathetic look in his face. It could not possibly be due to the death of his father, with whom he had lost all contact. He no longer looked rebellious and embittered as during his previous visit, but his mouth had a nervous twitch, almost as though he were in pain. Elisabeth did not want to ask him what great shock the town had given him. She enquired, though, whether he had ever come across Stephan in Vienna. He did not look up and merely said: "Oh, is Stephan in Vienna?" She told him that her brother was a medical student, and somehow she was unable to keep the other things from him: she told about Stephan's revolutionary ideas and about the meetings he was in the habit of visiting.

A vague smile appeared upon Toni's face. "Oh, now I understand what you mean," he said. "You thought I might have met him there. But I've been to no meetings for ever such a long time."

His voice seemed to betray boredom; perhaps there was even a touch of contempt for his former illusions. She wondered what was going to follow and suddenly he threw off his reserve. "Everything has gone so differently from what we expected in the trenches. Perhaps it would have been possible to build up something new, if only everybody had been to the war. But we've suffered and lived through those four years without their making any difference. We front-line men were simpletons. We imagined that people had enough of drinking one another's blood, we thought our feelings were shared by the soldiers on the other side. But there they celebrated their

miserable victory with a cowardly peace treaty for which they may yet have to pay dearly. Everything remained as it used to be, but now the last appearances and the last illusions on which the pre-war generation fed have dropped away."

Elisabeth felt sorry for him, but also a strange happiness. This half-hour together with Toni had already made a great difference. The painful memory of their previous meeting was at last obliterated.

She enquired with obvious interest what he was doing now. He shrugged his shoulders: "I've got a job. Otherwise I live just like all the others. I'm waiting for the day when they will allow us Austrians once more to go beyond the frontiers. I hope to get ever so far away: to America."

"What do you want to do there?"

"Work at my own job. I want to be a farmer."

"Need you go so far away for that?" The question was out before she thought of all it implied. He found it difficult to reply.

"I want to get somewhere where nothing reminds me of the past," he said.

"But, Toni, don't you think that you will sometimes long to be back in your own country? And is there nothing in your own past that ties you to it?"

He bowed down his head. "No," he said. An awkwardness had come between them, and all at once she felt the same discomfort of the previous meeting. He seemed to realize it and rose from his chair.

"I'll have to be going now. Just now my mother needs my help."

But the evening after the funeral he appeared unexpectedly before her. "I want to tell you something," he said. "My father's successor is cheating you."

She looked at him in surprise. "Have you got evidence about it?"

"Yes, I've got it. Otherwise I would not dare speak. If you care to know, I can put the evidence before you to-morrow night."

She felt weak with joy but she still tried to control herself. "You would render me a very great service," she said very quietly.

Her quiet surprised him. "Did you have your own suspicions before?" he asked. She merely nodded and suddenly, as he looked into her eyes, he realized for the first time what she had been through for the last months. "Couldn't you tell your father?" he asked.

Now she had to confess the truth. "He was prepared to believe this man rather than myself. I was powerless."

There was a long silence. At last Toni said: "Then it may have been a good thing after all that I came back here." But he turned the conversation at once. He told her how Christl, the young maid who was living with Rudinger, had betrayed to him what she knew about the new farmer. He had been able to see her by herself, she was

nervous and soon she gave everything away. Rudinger cooked his accounts, he kept money for himself and converted it into foreign currency. In an unguarded moment he told the girl that one day he and she would be masters of the whole farm, and then the whole world would be different. Christl had often wanted to go to the castle to confess what she knew, but she feared Rudinger like Satan, and she was sure that he would kill her if he found out that she had betrayed his secret.

Elisabeth drew a deep breath of relief. "At last!" she said. "But then Christl won't dare to be a witness against him," she added.

"We can do without her," said Toni. "To-morrow I'm going to town, and I'll question both contractors and customers. It would be useful to know through which bank he purchased his foreign currency."

Obviously Toni's plan was cut and dried. When he left, Elisabeth felt as though she could cope with life once more. It was long since she had felt so full of courage. Later she had a moment of disappointment when she suddenly realized that he was not doing all this for her sake but in order to avenge his father. But why should she mind? Did his motives matter so much?

The following day Angélique returned unexpectedly. She was as excited and pleased as after her previous excursion to Vienna. Von Hagel drove her to the castle with her luggage, but went on at once without putting in an appearance. Elisabeth drew the conclusion that he did not wish to present himself before her. But no, Angélique told her that he was coming to dinner. Elisabeth found it difficult to look straight at Angélique: there was something so painful about meeting her again. She quickly told her the news about Rudinger. Angélique listened with obvious satisfaction. "That's good! Now we've got the fellow in our power!"

"Provided Papa allows himself to be persuaded."

"Oh, but if the proofs are laid before him he will have to give way. Is his head a little clearer these days? At the worst we can inform the police."

While Elisabeth was shaking her head over this possibility, Angélique gave her a challenging look: "Don't you notice anything about me?"

"Yes . . . you've got a new coat."

"Why don't you say so, if you've noticed it?"

Elisabeth said nothing, but this did not disturb Angélique. "Of course you think I've made Siegfried give it to me. I could easily have done so. But I don't need his presents. Such presents only create obligations, don't they?" She gave her sister a quizzical look. "I've bought this coat with money I've earned myself. What do you think of that?"

"Earned yourself?"

Angélique nodded with an air of mystery. "I never realized it was so easy. Of course he helped me at first. What did I know about banking? But now I can manage even without him! Once you've discovered the secret of earning bags of money without as much as lifting a finger, you begin to wonder how some people remain stupid enough to tire themselves out working. I can pay you back some of the money you sent me before I came home."

She opened her bag and produced a roll of bank-notes.

Elisabeth felt there was something horrible about this money. She would never be able to accept it. "Angélique," she said, "I don't know anything about banking, even less than you. But is it honest to earn money that way?"

Angélique seemed unable to take offence that day. "Why should it not be honest? Whom does it harm?"

"Whom? Well, your own country, for one thing. You remember reading aloud those articles, don't you? Austria is still your country, Angélique!"

"And if it is? It's still Siegfried's, isn't it? And he taught me to speculate! You can't say that he does not feel for his country. Perhaps he feels so indifferent because this speculation will help to overthrow the republic a little sooner."

Elisabeth could not understand why these words distressed her so. More than once already she had realized with bitterness that Rudi had given his life for no reason at all, and that this republic did not deserve the sacrifices that had been made for it. Nevertheless to undermine it by these unscrupulous methods was only to bring new dishonour over a country that had already sunk so low. It was a grievous injustice to those who were too proud to take part in these destructive financial speculations. She said: "I don't talk about Freiherr von Hagel. He must judge himself what he can justify to his conscience. I'm thinking of you and of us. If you do such a thing it makes me feel guilty too. Remember Papa, Stephan, and our name."

Angélique was no longer laughing. She was angry. "It's easy to talk. All I know is that I haven't a penny of my own, and that my child and I are eating the bread of charity here. Do you think it's pleasant for me?"

The bread of charity! For a moment Elisabeth felt profoundly indignant; then pity took the upper hand. She wanted to put her arms round her sister and to ask her whether anybody here had behaved in such a way that she should feel like this. She wanted to tell her that she could never be unwelcome here. But she was afraid that Angélique might repulse her. Moreover, a sense of weakness took hold of her when her sister mentioned the child. "Little Jacques

is in the kitchen," she said, giving a curious turn to the conversation. "You haven't even asked for him!"

Angélique had really enough of being lectured to. She threw the money on the table with an angry gesture, closed her bag with trembling fingers and ran to her room. Elisabeth looked after her with tears in her eyes. She realized that she had not asked whether Angélique had met Stephan in Vienna.

Late in the afternoon Toni returned from Klagenfurt. He brought a detailed list which he had had no difficulty in extracting from the business men who had for so many years dealt with his father. All of them had at once allowed him to look at their books. "All we have to do now is to compare these amounts with the account Rudinger has given to your father. I suppose these accounts have been kept?"

"I think they have been," said Elisabeth, who had noticed more than once how her father dropped them into a drawer without even glancing at them.

She would have liked to ask Toni another question, but since the previous evening she found it more difficult to address any request to him. Happily he offered to do the very thing she wanted:

"Would you like me to be there when you tell your father about it?" He felt just what she wanted. She was afraid of her father's rage when she would stand before him unprotected. Perhaps he would consider all these figures as a dishonourable attack against his friend Rudinger and tear up the list without looking at it.

"Come along," she said, "let's go at once."

Georg looked distrustfully at his daughter when he saw her come in with the son of his former farmer. He was ill-tempered even before she began her story, and before she was half-through it he interrupted her and drew the list towards him with an angry gesture. "Where did you get all this?" he asked with a look of contempt in the direction of Toni. Toni stepped forward and told him the story. The quiet and self-possessed attitude and the tone of voice of the younger man restored Georg's calm. He looked down and kept his eyes fixed on the list. He stared at it for a long time. Was he comparing these figures with other figures which still vaguely stuck in his memory? Or did he see no figures at all and was he merely reduced to a dreadful indecision because he felt that he was wrong and that his own culpability would be mercilessly revealed?

Elisabeth noticed that his hands began to tremble. "Papa, don't be angry," she begged. "It was my duty to inform you!"

He made a furious gesture. "Leave me alone . . . I want to be alone . . . I want to investigate this all by myself!"

Before the two had left the room to wait next door he had already taken his keys. There was silence in his room for a while and then

Elisabeth heard his chair move. He called her in to bring him his hat and his stick.

"If you want to go there, Papa, I'll go with you." He waved her away, his face crimson. "No, no. I can still do this by myself. I may be old, but I'm not yet senile. I can still go and tell the fellow that his deceit has been discovered and I'll chase him away from this farm like a dog . . . like a dog. . . ." He lifted his stick with a threatening air and shuffled along the passage and down the stairs. "I really believe that he will manage it by himself," said Toni reassuringly. "But for my own private satisfaction I wish I could witness the scene." She was so agitated, however, that he decided to stay. "Is there anything else I can do for you?" he asked.

"All you can still do for me is to find a new farmer."

He understood very well what she meant, but his face remained impassive. "You will do well to be a little more careful in your choice," he said.

"And you don't think you know of anybody, Toni?"

He looked down quickly, because he knew that if he looked into her eyes he was lost. He had felt this threat throughout the previous night and now the perilous moment had arrived. But he had not expected that she would make it so very difficult for him. He had told her clearly enough that he wanted to get away to a new country to build up his life on a new basis.

"No . . . how should I?" he asked. But he added at once: "If you think it will help you and your father, I don't mind looking after the farm for a while, until you've found a suitable successor. Of course I shall have to make myself free for this."

She felt how difficult he found it to make even this offer, though it was so much less than what she had hoped for. Was his attitude not humiliating for her? After all, it could not be such a very great sacrifice for him. And was it not natural that in her present circumstances she should appeal to him? "I knew I could count on you," she said, somewhat coolly.

Later on he reflected with bitterness that she was perfectly right: she knew that she could count on him! But had he not been right also in feeling that he ought never to return to Maria-Licht? Would he still have the strength to go away after a month, or whenever the time arrived? She was satisfied now. Why should she mind whether he was consumed by restlessness and dissatisfaction? Oh, but he would not stay a moment longer than was necessary. It was as though he could not breathe any longer here, at Maria-Licht, where his heart was on the rack, could not breathe, indeed, in the whole of Austria, his maimed country. He felt cooped up even in this sick and disintegrating Europe. He wanted to cross the ocean as soon as possible. He wanted to be in a country where every square yard was not yet

covered with the dust of centuries, among a younger people whose mind was not yet confused by ineradicable notions of caste. He was not in his place here; the feudal relationship between farmer and landlord into which one glance from her had drawn him back was no longer meant for him.

What, he wondered, did Elisabeth imagine had made him stand up for her as he had done? In her eyes, no doubt, it was all very simple. He had offered his services out of a sense of decency and gratitude because his father had been allowed to run the farm for so many years. Her sense of social differences was so much a part of herself that she was utterly impervious to the notion that he might have for her deeper feelings than were allowed to a man of his rank. How could she suspect that when he was a mere boy he used to dream of her? Each time he met her the cruel wound he was doomed always to suffer from began to bleed again. But this time he had enough of it. He was going to see this last job through because he had promised it. Then she would shake his hand with the condescending air of the lady who thanks her servant for a very special service. But meanwhile her clear blue eyes would look at him with goodwill and even with a little tenderness. And this last look would be the reward he would carry around with him for the rest of his life.

When he told his mother that night that he was going to stay a little longer, the old woman cried with joy. Although only the day before a corpse had been carried away, there was an atmosphere of joy on the farm. The Baron had called and banged the big oak table with his heavy stick and driven out that swine of a farmer. The only pity was that the little fool Christl disappeared an hour after he left. Apparently she had not been able to let her lover go away to the misery he deserved.

At table Angélique flirted the whole evening with her travel companion. She did it to tease her sister, because Elisabeth never tired of preaching at her. Papa asked for his meal to be served in his own room. Perhaps he had excited himself a little too much at the farm, and possibly he felt a little ashamed at having been so obstinate and so blind. Elisabeth was too busy with little Jacques to notice how von Hagel listened only with half an ear to Angélique's chatter, though it was animated and frequently quite witty chatter. From time to time he cast a pensive glance in the direction of Elisabeth. She cut herself off so completely from the conversation that much escaped her which might otherwise have hurt or irritated her.

She was entirely filled with the happy thought that as long as Toni managed the farm there would be one worry less for her. She even felt a vague hope that it might yet prove possible to make him stay somewhat longer and give up his fantastic plans.

What a great support Toni would be for her! She ought to tell him

one of these days? And with his knowledge of Vienna he would be able to give her good advice if she had more difficulties with Stephan. After all she had already taken him into her confidence.

The more she thought of it the less she seemed able to finish enumerating all the reasons that would make it such an agreeable thing if Toni settled definitely on the farm.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A CASTLE TO LET

GEORG made no objection when Elisabeth told him what had been agreed with young Eisengruber. After what had happened he felt that she had the right to manage his affairs. He was growing old, it had been proved; he had lost his clearness of vision. It was not only that his knowledge of human beings had deserted him. These crazy times were more than he could cope with. He could not count in thousands and tens of thousands of crowns. To-morrow perhaps it would be in millions, and the more money they poured into the country the poorer it seemed to become. How could one understand such things at his age? If Elisabeth could, let her keep the accounts.

He noticed himself how relieved he felt to be rid of all responsibility. He slept better than he had done for a long time, and in the spring he went riding out now and then. He did not go far, because it tired him even to go at foot pace, and when he was alone in the midst of the fields which he used to enjoy so much he was suddenly seized by a strange anxiety: it would be dreadful to die suddenly away from home and without his daughter. Sometimes, when he did not feel very well, he was driven by a sense of false pride to go out in spite of it. What would his horse think of him if he did not make use of this splendid sunny spring weather? But he never felt happy till the castle came in sight once more and little Jacques ran out to meet him. No, it would not be granted to him to go riding with this little chap as he had done once with his four children. But that had been a time that was infinitely far away, in a previous existence. The first Stephan was buried by Maria's side, Elisabeth . . . his other daughter . . . Rudi . . . the picture rose so clearly before his old eyes, and with the precision of a dream he heard around him the snorting of the ponies, the laughter and the chatter of the children. Had all these things been real once?

The discovery of Rudinger's deceit seemed to have drawn a veil from his eyes. He had refused to take notice of anything except of his son whom the Russians had killed. Now he felt once more how happy he was to have his daughter Elisabeth. He did not dare show it, because he still felt ashamed of what had happened. But for the first time for many years he told Ignaz to drive him to the churchyard and he went to tell Maria how guilty he was. It was as though he at last understood his wife. She, poor woman, had never been able to get over her grief for the loss of their child. He placed flowers

from the garden on her grave and he was certain that she could see him standing there, and that she knew as well as he did that it could not be long before they were united again.

That summer was the last in which he went out riding. The land had been mown, harvested and ploughed. From the back of his horse he looked round meditatively. Here at any rate everything went as it used to, though he grew older and older and felt the approach of death. Through the war and through peace the work on the land continued, and this was as it should be. Happy were they who recognized the command that they must labour for their bread, and happy were they who were satisfied to do so. When one looked at this life from the quietude of old age one saw that it held something beautiful. He had lived and been given his full measure of joy and of sorrow, and now both made him happy. Now that he was slowly preparing to go and meet his dead boy and his wife Maria, he would not have missed anything of what had come his way.

His eyes had grown weaker recently but he did not want the trouble of spectacles. It was as though in the golden haze of sunlight all things were simpler and more lovely. He did not feel the least desire to see them more clearly. Possibly his hearing was also growing weaker, but he did not want to have sounds around him. He could still hear the songs of the birds and think of all the happiness they had given him throughout his life. Seated in his arm-chair he was able to listen in silence to the chatter of his grandson, who so often reminded him of Maria's dead son. It did not matter whether he heard what the boy was saying. It was the voice itself, still very, very young, to which he listened for hours, his head leaning backwards in his chair. He wished he could have fallen asleep for ever. It would have been so lovely to do so with the quiet knowledge that there was no need to wake up again, because it was for the sake of this small creature here that the cornfields were rustling and bearing fruit outside and because Elisabeth was there to look after everything.

Being able once more to walk into the farm was for Elisabeth like being given a wonderful present that fills one with gratitude. She went there every morning and little Jacques was never satisfied until she had found time to take him by the hand for her daily visit. He had to scratch the little calves on their foreheads, and to press a lump of sugar between the lips of the foals. Those lips curled so funnily round the sugar as they pressed it to their teeth. One of the farm hands lifted him on to a horse and Aunt Elisabeth asked whether he would like to have a pony for himself when he was a little taller. She never met Toni, who was out in the fields from daybreak, but she stayed to drink a cup of coffee with his mother, and she listened to her unceasing tale of happy gratitude. Toni looked so much better than

when he came back from town. "It's your job to see to it that he stays with us, Elisabeth."

Elisabeth needed no encouragement. She would certainly not drive him away. To show him how much interest she took in him and in his work she sought him out in the fields and made him show her how everything was going. He never failed to do his share of work. He was a comrade for his labourers, he dressed just like them, and one noticed that he was the master only when he stood up and his lean figure towered above them.

When she arrived he wiped the sweat from his brow and answered her friendly greeting. Sometimes his manner seemed a little shy, but sometimes also it seemed to reveal a little of the profound irony with which he threw her a challenge, as it were, and when this happened it made her feel strangely confused. She did not understand him. Did he consider that she had treated him unjustly?

A month had passed, and still not a word had been said about the successor who would have to be found. Elisabeth lived in unhappy anticipation of the moment when he would remind her of their agreement. But so far he had not mentioned it and she lacked courage to refer to the subject. What about him? When she walked away he longed to look after the tall fair girl, but instead he bent down over his work, because he did not want to make himself ridiculous in the eyes of the men and the maids and more still, perhaps, in his own eyes.

Magdalena was forgetting her sorrow for her husband's death in her happiness over her son's return. She seemed so gay that people might have thought ill of her if they had not remembered how difficult the last few years with the old cantankerous man had been. "I tell you, Elisabeth, the boy is finding pleasure again in the work. He has farming in his blood though he won't admit it. I know he's already thinking of changes he wants to introduce when there's money from the sale of the crops. He wants to modernize everything. Well, after all, we sent him to the agricultural school in order that he might know better than ourselves. I don't mind anything as long as he's enjoying life once more. And as long as he stays here, Elisabeth, here, near me."

She could of course have resumed her old place at the farm-house and seated herself at the head of the table, but she preferred to live in the shed that had been given to her husband for his last few years. She took her meals there by herself. "I can manage very well here," she said to Elisabeth. "If I went to live with my son he would never notice that there is an empty place waiting for a younger woman." This remark of the old woman made Elisabeth smile, and as she spoke Magdalena looked a little shy and also a little resentful. There was an undefinable expression in her eyes. Magdalena knew why her son

was not looking for a farmer's daughter. He had all the choice he wanted, but he was foolish enough to set his heart upon something that was out of reach.

Was it out of reach? Perhaps it was because of her old age that Magdalena could no longer think that the thing was impossible. Her son had studied, and had learned to behave as a gentleman. No farmer's daughter could ever get influence over him and become the mistress of this farm. And if one of these days the Baron came to die or if Angélique went away with her little son, Elisabeth would be left all alone. Whose company could she wish for that would be better than Toni's? In the old days such a thought would have appeared impossible to Magdalena, but now the whole world was topsy-turvy and it really didn't matter so much now where one had been cradled. All that counted was what one had become and to what extent one had the strength to maintain oneself in this new world. Did Elisabeth seriously imagine that she would be able to cope with all the difficulties that were still ahead? She might be ever so courageous, but as a woman Magdalena would have liked to assure her that she was mistaken and that she would yet bitterly regret it if she did not overcome her pride of race and accept the hand of a farmer. He had a heart of gold, was devoted to her, and besides he was a real man, by whose side she would be safe. When Elisabeth sometimes enquired after Toni and involuntarily betrayed some of her affection for him, old Magdalena had the greatest difficulty not to say more than she ought. Her trouble was that if she was still to witness the thing for which she now longed most of all it would have to come soon. It was not so much because of Elisabeth that she checked her tongue, but because she feared the dark anger of her son. She thought with terror of the possibility that he might run away from this house in a moment of fury and go back to the accursed town which had once before robbed him of his health and of his happiness.

Did Elisabeth, who never made a single comment, understand what she was driving at? Yes, Elisabeth did understand her, and it was because of this that she began to avoid being left alone with the old woman. She could not herself have described her feeling of embarrassment when Magdalena came out with her unambiguous allusion to the empty place by Toni's side. Of course it was the strange notion of the old mother who doted on her only son, who was infinitely proud of him, and who had lost her sense of reality. But at the same time Elisabeth realized that Toni had over her, who was his employer, a much greater power than that which was due to his indispensability on the farm. And he appeared to be conscious of this power and sometimes even disposed to use it. But if he tried she would resist with all the strength that was in her. At other times he seemed to wish to spare her, as though he felt ashamed himself of the strange

influence he exercised. When he was in this mood he dropped his eyes when he spoke to her. Once before she had escaped from him, in those days when he became so friendly with Paul. It seemed to be written in the stars that this fear of his mysterious power over her would live within her. When they had met again, however, her only thought was how much better for her it would be if Toni would take Rudinger's place. But everything was just as it had always been between them. As soon as she was with him she lost all her assurance. She began to feel him around her all the time, even when he was far away in the fields and she was doing domestic work at home. It was as though he were looking at her and as though there were on his lips a slightly scornful and almost pitying smile, because she tried so bravely but so unsuccessfully to hold in her hands the government of the castle, of Stephan and of herself. She was curiously obsessed by the conviction that if Toni were to go away she would lose the farm and also herself.

She became most conscious of her helplessness when she stood before him with little Jacques holding her hand. Was it because at such a moment he was bound to see what was lacking in her life? He must notice that she was trying to make-believe, pretending to be a mother to someone else's child. She began to wonder how she had been able to hold out so long before he came back. In those days she felt Paul behind her in everything she did. Was Toni's power then so great that he could even part her from Paul?

If only she could have brought herself to do it she would have gone to him, and begged him, merely as a friend of Paul, to continue his work here and to leave her alone. But could she reproach him with anything? What had he done to her? Was he imagining things like his mother? No, he was not so foolish: he preferred to avoid her. And supposing that all these years had been a flight from her? Suddenly she could not doubt this any longer: it was as though she realized it already when during the war she used to write to him on behalf of his mother while he was at the front.

He had wanted to return to Vienna immediately after his father's funeral. Then she had persuaded him against his inclination to stay, and the appalling and paralysing thing was that even now she did not feel the strength to let him go. Was she so cowardly and so devoid of conscience that she wanted to sacrifice him to the welfare of the farm? Or was she herself committing the stupid mistake with which she reproached his mother? Was she losing all sense of proportion? Was there growing in her this same sense of absolute dependence upon Toni which she once had for Paul? Had she merely pretended to herself when she decided that after Paul's death there could never be another man for her?

She did not want to think any more. She could not think any

more. She fled to her room, to Paul, and she sobbed out her heart in despair. Perhaps she was growing more nervous than usual in these days, because Stephan sent so little news from Vienna. Everything, everything came at the same time and there were moments when she believed it was all growing too much for her. Perhaps, after all, she would have to go and look for the real successor of Rudinger.

Angélique travelled regularly to Vienna and now and then she met Stephan. But as though in order to tease her sister she never told of these meetings unless she were asked. This was her revenge, because Elisabeth continued to criticise her actions by her silence. One day, with an amused smile, Angélique made some half-revelations about a relationship which seemed to exist between Stephan and a third-rate little actress. Elisabeth was dumbfounded by the news. She did not even realize that her worldly-wise sister was enjoying the effect on Elisabeth of her revelation. The notion that here was a new and incalculable danger for her brother made her feel almost sick. Perhaps it was due to a maternal blindness about Stephan that she could not see in him anything but a child. Or was it perhaps because she was conscious of his infinite weakness that she feared at once that this adventure might have catastrophic results? Angélique refused to take the thing tragically. "She will help him to get rid of his Communist notions," she said. "Last time when Siegfried wanted to have a discussion with him, his interest in politics seemed already to have grown remarkably less."

"How long have you known about it?"

"Oh, for some little time."

"And you didn't tell me."

"Siegfried thought that the whole thing would have blown over after a week because that kind of stage-door love usually doesn't last longer. But Stephan does not yet know the rules of the game. She'll have to give him a bit of training. He still seems to imagine that he is the one and only. It's all too beautiful to be true, but I have not yet felt I could arouse him from his blissful blindness. Siegfried, anyhow, thinks that it will be healthier for him to acquire his experience by himself."

Elisabeth stared out before her. "And you too have not thought of anything else? For instance, have you wondered at all what will be happening to his studies?"

"One can't study everything at once," was Angélique's opinion.

As so often, Elisabeth felt sorry as soon as she had spoken to her sister. She had referred to Stephan's studies because she hoped that this at any rate would appeal a little to her sister. For herself this was not even the worst aspect. An airy remark which Angélique added startled her: "It's a joke that costs a fair amount of money."

"Money . . .?" Elisabeth remembered now that Stephan had not written for money for quite a time. She looked straight at her sister: "Tell me . . . have you given him money for this?"

Angélique shrugged her shoulders: "Until recently I had not the faintest notion what he wanted money for. And I do remember that last time he didn't even ask me for money."

"But he must get the money somewhere?"

"Yes," said Angélique, and her voice revealed that the affair was not very dark for her. "He must get it from somewhere, for the very least he can do is to send her flowers when she is acting."

As Angélique did not seem inclined to tell her more Elisabeth did not put any more questions. Her pride forbade her to humiliate herself any further. After all, she knew enough. Stephan had also learned the art of making money some way or another in Vienna. He had learned the art from Angélique, and the small remainder of aristocratic sentiment in him did not seem to be offended by this. He left it to his older sister to feel ashamed in his place.

A little later that day she felt more forgiving. Stephan was still so young and he was in urgent need of money, and perhaps Angélique, who was no longer speculating from necessity but from love of the game, had misled him by her frivolous reasoning. It was particularly against Angélique that she was so bitterly disposed and she would have liked to tell her this. But supposing her sister took it ill and walked out of the house once and for all this time. The danger existed continually, anyhow, that one day she would no longer feel like travelling to and from Vienna and would find a home in the capital for herself and little Jacques. Elisabeth was obliged therefore to wish that the "friendship" with Frieheerr von Hagel might last a long time. He wanted to keep an eye on his estate and he liked to shoot there. Remembering this she tried to overcome her distaste for him and to be friendly towards him whenever he came to dine. Von Hagel still seemed to have the same deep feeling for her. Sometimes he looked at her a little questioningly, as though he wanted to make sure that this new friendliness was sincere and that she no longer disapproved of him because of the relationship that existed between him and her sister. She got the impression again that her first surmise had been correct, that he had never sought this adventure and that she had simply overwhelmed him. Sometimes he was remarkably curt in addressing Angélique, and he had for her a particular form of cynical politeness that was almost insulting. When this happened, the Major, who never took part in any conversation, looked up with vague distrust and cast towards his guest a threatening glance which called him back to reason at once.

Angélique tried to treat such incidents lightly. She attributed Siegfried's ill-humour to the fact that he had had an unlucky week and

that a somewhat risky transaction had not been successful. But she was aware that he still loved her sister in secret. His better self, as he called it, was fascinated by Elisabeth. Luckily she had learned to know him sufficiently to realize that he saved up his better self for exclusive use during his holidays. When they had their morning coffee together in Vienna and read the latest rates of exchange in the paper his better self was sound asleep and he was entirely under her sway.

Sometimes Elisabeth felt that a struggle was going on in him. This made her more inclined to be kind to him. In this mood she wanted to ask him how Stephan was doing, and to implore him to keep an eye on her brother. But why should she have any illusions? Von Hagel was too busy with his own affairs when he was in Vienna, and she had no wish to place herself under an obligation towards him.

On that Monday after Angélique had shocked her so with her news about Stephan she suddenly felt a dreadful anxiety. What was she to do? Should she take a train and go to Vienna? She did not want to make Stephan feel that she came in order to spy on him or to order him about. It would be difficult to talk with him in Vienna and the journey would be fruitless and humiliating. She counted the days before he came home for long vacation. Would he tell her anything without being questioned? So far he had always preferred to give his confidence to Angélique.

She meditated whether she could get advice from Father Aigner. But she knew his reply beforehand: Stephan is young and will still have to go through many follies. Father Aigner, with his silver hair round his brown and furrowed forehead, tended more and more to look upon all things in a generous and kindly mood. For himself this conception of life might be consoling. It might bring him rest, but Elisabeth was not yet ripe for it. She only saw the immediate danger threatening Stephan. She did not know to what extent this speculating was forbidden by law. But instinct told her that it would be Stephan's downfall. Why did he not rather ask her for money? Was he too proud to do this while he lacked the pride that might have prevented his sullyng his ancient name? Had she ever refused to send him what he asked for? It is true that on those occasions he had always been able to explain the use he wanted to make of the money.

There was only one person who could help in her difficulty and she could not possibly mix him up with this business. Toni could not be told of the shame Stephan was heaping upon himself. It was bad enough that other people like von Hagel knew of it. Moreover, she had already appealed once for Toni's assistance and she had to pay heavily enough for it. She could not give him the impression that he was absolutely indispensable.

Again she counted the weeks and the days that still separated her

from the hour when she could have a private talk with Stephan. Her restlessness and impatience drove her out of the house. Sometimes she went for long walks through the woods, until she felt a little calmed by fatigue. Then her anxious thoughts tortured her less for the time being. As she passed the farm on her way back she had the greatest difficulty in resisting the temptation to look in there for a moment's rest. She was afraid that, even if she did not speak, Toni would notice her despair and would feel how much she needed his support. She did not realize that, just back from the fields, he saw her pass by the window and felt profoundly disappointed: why had she not called?

A letter came from Vienna. Elisabeth had to read it twice before she was able to take in its contents. Stephan wrote that he would come home only towards the end of the vacation, because he had arranged with friends to go to Salzkammergut. He did not require money for the excursion because he was invited to stay. She looked with bitter disappointment at the document in which for the first time Stephan proclaimed his complete freedom of action. It was no longer the letter of a boy asking permission to go on a little holiday expedition. He simply informed her of the facts and in his cool tone there was a warning that she need not attempt to compel him to come home. The letter gave her several sleepless nights. She wanted to wait to reply till Saturday, when she could have a talk with Angélique. There was no hurry in any case since he did not ask for her permission.

Angélique grinned as she always did when Elisabeth told her of her worries about Stephan. "Of course, it's a lie," she said. "He hasn't been invited anywhere. But surely you don't expect him to tell you the truth? If he did he would have to say: 'Would you mind asking Papa whether I can go to the country for a few weeks with a little actress?' I knew all about his plans. Siegfried expects that his experiment will also be his cure. He will live from day to day with his sweetheart and not merely see her behind the footlights or in her dressing-room, all made up and painted." It almost amused Angélique to see how guileless her sister looked. What did Elisabeth know about the world, and what did she understand about it? She lived here in the country like a nun, mourning a fiancé who had died in the war, just like the girls in novels. "Siegfried intends to visit a few old friends in Germany and we have arranged to pay a surprise visit on Stephan in his summer paradise. We are rather enjoying the thought of the shock he'll get when we suddenly appear before him and he has to introduce his lady-love to us."

Elisabeth was unable to take things as simply as this. She sat down that evening and wrote a long letter to Stephan. She did not expect

that the letter would make much difference, but she could not help writing. Something compelled her to tell him what fears filled her heart. She made it clear at once that she was not angry, but only concerned as a sister would be, and mainly, perhaps, because she seemed to have lost his confidence. She admitted that he alone could decide who was worthy of possessing his heart, but she had to warn him against women in general and against actresses in particular. She advised him to make very sure that the woman of whom he was fond was not playing with him. Was a girl who compelled him to spend more than he could afford capable of genuine love for him? She could understand and forgive much, provided she could also be sure that he would not throw away his honour and his good name by doing something irreparable. She reminded him that it was exclusively for his sake that she took so much trouble about the estate. He was the heir and on the day he came to live here with his wife she would go away and leave the field clear for the two of them. She thought that this was the best way to bring Stephan back to the consciousness of his name and of his social position, and also to cure him of his dangerous speculating mania.

She was full of hope when she posted the letter, but there was no reply. She was alone once more with her father and little Jacques, and tried to do her work without continuously thinking of Stephan. But she was so worried that, in the course of a conversation with Toni, she suddenly said: "Stephan won't be home till the end of the holiday this time. . . ."

It was an access of weakness that made her betray herself like this in his presence. No sooner had she spoken than she became terrified lest Toni should begin to question her. She was so startled that she began to talk very fast about unimportant matters. But Toni did not think of asking questions. He had not noticed anything unusual in her voice. He thought that she was making small talk because, coming across him in the fields, she was compelled to converse with him. His old bitterness rose up in him. He would tell her something which would stop this exchange of courtesy. Talking very quietly, though he found it more difficult than he had expected, he explained that he had now helped her through the busiest time on the farm. He hoped therefore to be relieved from his task. It had been a pleasure to oblige her, but now the summer was nearly over could she not find someone who would take over the work from him towards September or October?

She had expected this announcement for many weeks, but it came to her as a blow nevertheless. For the first moment or two she had a stupid feeling that he was wickedly deserting her. Of course, she thought, if he did not mind leaving her to face her difficulties by herself, he had better go. She was not going to hold him back. But

she was too upset to speak and she merely gave him a chilly nod. He looked up quickly and full of suspicion. Had she someone in view to take his place? There was perplexity and almost hatred in his eyes after she turned away and left without speaking a word. If she had really already found somebody for the farm he was a threefold fool to continue working for her. Perhaps she was not even aware of the fact that staying on the farm had been a great sacrifice on his part.

His mother was startled when she noticed how angry he was. She asked him if anything was wrong with the work, "With the work? No, nothing. But I've had about enough of it. I've told the young lady of the castle that I'll feel myself released from my obligation pretty soon. Anyhow she seems to know already who'll take my place." The old woman looked at her son with tear-stained eyes. He turned from her and looked out through the window towards the meadows and the fields that bore the fruit of his labour.

Elisabeth could not bring herself to come and talk matters over with him. During the days that followed she gave up her daily round along the fields. She lived in a state of dull despair. She was obsessed with her fears about Stephan, and she found it impossible to sit down and give serious consideration to the matter of Toni's successor. She made no effort and allowed herself to drift. Toni, of course, had no inkling of this. During the day's work he often looked up, longing to catch sight of her. The fact that she kept away confirmed his belief that she had already taken a decision. There was no further need to pretend that she took an interest in his work. Probably she had never been interested at all.

He even thought that he knew what Elisabeth intended to do. Freiherr von Hagel regularly travelled to Vienna with her sister, but it was obviously Elisabeth he was courting. Toni had seen them together once or twice, and this had been sufficient. The Freiherr was in love with her. Perhaps he intended that his estate manager should run the farm of Maria-Licht together with the von Hagel estate and Elisabeth imagined that this was possible. One ought to warn her against this scheme. But did she deserve it? Toni would have done it himself, but he was afraid that they might imagine that he wanted to become the farmer here and that he only announced his departure in order that she might beg him not to go. But he was in earnest, and now more than ever. If he felt at all sorry it was for the sake of his mother.

He tried to overcome his resentment and to think once more about his future. But he was still so busy on the farm that he had no time to think ahead. Besides, why worry about what was waiting for him? He would fall on his feet somehow, it did not matter where.

He used to have few illusions about his future: he realized that

he was merely trying to escape from his own past. But now he realized that there was no future for him on the other side of the ocean. Life had nothing more to give him. Why should he try to build a new life somewhere else? He could have been happy here if he could have thought of his work as his father did. Somehow a new sensation had come to him while he was here: it was as though after long and distant journeys he was back in a safe harbour. At first he refused to admit it, but now he knew that it was true. The mere fact that an apple tree into which he climbed as a boy had quietly continued its growth through these incredibly dark and cruel years, as though there had never been a world war or a revolution, was sometimes enough suddenly to reconcile him to all he had suffered during those years. There were the peaceful evenings: there was the red of the setting sun behind the dark woods as in the old days, and the sound of the bells of the cattle being driven home. When the stable door stood open the hay gave out the same scent as when he was a boy, and there was the familiar silhouette of the castle against the moonlit sky. When the mists hung round the orchard there was a deep quiet, but he could not enjoy it, because he was consumed with a longing that hurt, and that made it impossible for him to feel grateful for his home-coming.

A few days after von Hagel and Angélique had left for Germany little Jacques caught a chill and had to stay in bed. His temperature was not very high and Elisabeth did not think it necessary to send a telegram to his mother. In answer to a call sent out to Dr. Prisswitz a young man arrived with the surprising news that he had taken over his practice. Prisswitz's eyesight had grown so bad that he could no longer work. He had gone to Vienna for another operation but he did not expect much from it. The news had an incredibly depressing effect upon her. She felt guilty towards her good old friend because she had neglected him so long. She might have gone to see him if only she could have brought a little joy into his dark home. But how could she have taken her worries to him?

She was so busy looking after her little invalid that she failed to notice how intensely the child's illness was affecting her father. The old Major sat absent-mindedly at the table and hardly touched a thing. He did not even enquire after the child. Elisabeth imagined that he had forgotten his grandson, and therefore she did not mention him. She did not know that the old man was afraid to enquire because, living continually between dream and reality, he imagined that Jacques had died just like Rudi and the first Stephan. Weird terrors agitated his decaying mind. They kept him awake at night, while he listened to the sighing of the wind in the trees just as Maria used to do. Elisabeth found out his secret sorrow when she found him crying in his room one day. It was the first time she had ever seen

him in tears. She dropped on her knees by his side and tried to find out why he was unhappy. But he pressed his lips together and proudly turned away from her. "Why are you crying, Papa? Is it for Rudi? Or for Mama? Or is it because Stephan won't come home? I shall write to him to come at once. You aren't crying because little Jacques is ill, are you? It's nothing serious. The doctor says that he may get up in a few days' time. Won't you come and see him in his little bed? He'd be so pleased. He has asked for you."

With trembling hands the old man fumbled for his handkerchief, because the tears kept running down his grey and hollow cheeks. Suddenly she had the impression that he had forgotten everything except that he wanted his handkerchief. She found it for him. In the evening he did not come down for dinner and he could not be persuaded to leave his room. Elisabeth was almost in a state of collapse. She wondered whether she would have to look after a second patient, and she was greatly relieved when old Anna came in very slowly and asked to be allowed to look after her old master. "I'm not much good, nowadays, Fräulein Elisabeth, but perhaps I can still do this. I mean just look after him a little. He can't be left alone in his room the whole day, can he?" She knocked at his door, and when there was no reply she simply walked in and she stayed there for more than an hour. At last she came back: "He isn't ill, he's simply gone all childish. He only listens to me when I talk child language to him, and then he stops crying. Do leave him to me. I'm glad that there is still something for me to do."

Elisabeth received the news listlessly. She could almost envy her father because his nerves had at last given way, while she had to go on with her lonely struggle. Sometimes, when she could not sleep, she took little Jacques in her bed in order not to be so dreadfully lonely. How she would have liked to have a good cry with the warm child pressed against her. But she must not be weak. Meanwhile Anna looked after her master as though he had been her own husband. As his head was in any case no longer clear she could now and then secretly talk to him in the same motherly and tender way that she used for Krone. In the kitchen, when she went down in the afternoon for the strengthening draught to which she had grown accustomed in the last few years, she related with a feeling of triumph how the Major sometimes took her for the Baroness and sometimes for his daughter Elisabeth.

Anna's eyesight was no longer good enough for sewing and mending, but she knitted, and meanwhile she told the Major everything that passed through her head. There was not much sense in it, but it didn't matter because he didn't listen. The main thing was that he did not feel alone and was quieter. She told him about Mariedl and about all she had done to present Ignaz with a son, but it had been

a girl once more. She told him many other things, some about to-day, others from thirty years ago. It didn't matter whether she talked about the Chicago gangsters or the death of the poor Empress in Geneva. Sometimes she talked about the children as though they were still alive, and her husband also, and while she did this she believed it herself and she felt happy. She slept in a little room next to the Baron's bedroom and she kept the door between them open so that she could hear if he began to cry at night. Then she got up, lit a candle, and kept up a flow of talk even though her eyelids dropped with fatigue. For Anna had grown so old that she could stand anything. Anything, except that her good old master should cry.

One day Stephan appeared altogether unexpectedly at the castle. Elisabeth ran to him with a happy cry of surprise. But he admitted at once that he only came in order to meet Angélique. He thought she was at the castle, because he had tried in vain to get her on the telephone in Vienna.

"What did you want of her?" asked Elisabeth, angry from disappointment. "Have you got into difficulties? Can't you tell me about them?"

He shook his head and pursed his lips. She hardly recognized him. His face had grown older and looked deadly tired. It was as though he were crushed by a great sorrow. She had never seen him like this, so resolute and hostile in his resistance to her authority. She was unable to persuade him to go and see his father. All he wanted to know was where was Angélique at the moment. Elisabeth was weak enough to tell him. "In Berlin. . . ." He looked startled. "Well, I'll have to get to Berlin. I must leave for Berlin at once." But his tone lacked conviction. She fancied she could guess the reason.

"Have you got enough money for the journey?" He did not reply. His lips remained proudly pursed, but they twitched nervously. "Stephan, what *is* the matter with you? Do tell me, please. Do you want help? Can't I help you just as well as Angélique? You know that I would do anything, absolutely anything for you. Why do you hurt me so, why won't you let me help you? I'm here, and Angélique is far away in Berlin. Stephan, do speak. Is it only money you need?"

He still kept silent and she sank down into a chair. "If you want much money . . . then I can't give it you. Perhaps in a month, when the harvest is sold. But if it were absolutely necessary . . . Something might be found. I shall do all I can to get some money, somehow, for you. But I must know what you need it for. I shan't be angry. Put your cards on the table, Stephan, and keep nothing to yourself."

At last he spoke, though he found it difficult. "It isn't a matter of money. I only want a little in order to travel to Berlin. . . ." She

knew he was lying. "All right," she said resignedly. "Go to Angélique. I'll give you money for the journey. Ignaz can drive you to the station—you look dog-tired. Won't you have some food before you go?"

He said he was not hungry. He would get something to eat in the train. He moved already towards the door in order to make clear that he was in a hurry to get away. She tried to show with a little contemptuous smile that she understood him and went to fetch the money. With a head that felt empty she stood over her father's writing-desk and found it almost impossible to calculate how much Stephan would need. At last she took a large sum, certainly more than he would require, because she was suddenly afraid that, humiliated by being kept waiting so long, he might have already run away. But he stood there by the door, pale and dejected, his eyes cast down. When she handed him the little pile of bank-notes he muttered something like: "Pay you back in a week's time."

"I have never lent you anything, and I don't want this back either," she said with tears in her voice. He kissed her hand, a ridiculous gesture which she tried to stop, and rushed away. Downstairs she heard him ordering Ignaz in the tone of a young master to harness the horses.

Elisabeth lived through the days that separated her from the return of her sister with the oppressive feeling that a catastrophe was drawing near. But Angélique explained the situation with a smile of triumph. "Of course he came for money. What else would he come for? His woman jilted him the moment he ran dry. But how could you expect him to tell you? Even with me he tried to deny it and I had a lot of trouble before I got it out of him." "And . . . what did you do?" Angélique shrugged her shoulders. "He wanted rather a lot this time, but Siegfried helped him."

"What! Does he accept money from strangers?"

Angélique considered that she could allow herself to feel hurt by this remark. She turned away and left her sister alone.

Von Hagel was coming to dinner that evening. He first drove to his home in order to deliver his trunk and to look through his mail. When he appeared Angélique was still dressing and Elisabeth found herself alone with him. She was able to put into words the intolerable fear that had oppressed her for the last hour. "Do tell me, von Hagel, has Stephan borrowed money from you?"

Her guest seemed strangely absent-minded. It was almost as though he did not dare look her straight in the eyes. With a pretence of indifference he admitted: "Yes, I did lend him a little."

"Then I shall pay you back. How much was it?"

"I am sorry you treat me so formally," he said in a tone of regret.

"I don't see any reason for being other than formal with you in

this matter," she said. "You haven't answered my question yet. How much was it?"

Von Hagel looked at her as though he were cornered. "I should very much like not to tell you. I have my special reasons for this."

She looked at him. "If by any chance there is something else as well, do tell me," she said. "Tell me everything."

Her voice was so imploring that it made him waver. He looked over his shoulder to the door. "Perhaps it is better that you should know. After all, it's not with this miserable sum of money that I am concerned, but with Stephan himself. Something has gone wrong. I wrote him a cheque on Vienna. He wanted to go there. And just now I got a notice from the bank, from which it appears that ten times the amount has been cashed."

He saw that Elisabeth turned pale. Full of compunction he stepped forward to assist her. But she drew back and looked at him with savage hostility in her eyes.

"Why did you lead him into temptation?"

He blushed and did not find an immediate answer. "So you accept without further question that Stephan could? . . . I have been breaking my head to think of other possibilities. The cheque may have been stolen from him and the amount altered afterwards."

Elisabeth shook her head. "No, no, no," she said in a toneless voice. "Stephan has done it. When he left here I knew that he was capable of doing anything. That woman has driven him out of his senses. The rest lies on your conscience."

He felt his complicity so strongly, and he was so moved by her misery, that he made another step in her direction. He whispered: "Don't be afraid. There will be no consequences. It might all have been much worse. The bank had no suspicion and paid the amount without querying it. Thank goodness, the cheque was covered."

It was as though she did not take in what he was saying. There was a vacant look in her eyes. Then suddenly life returned to them and she looked at him with vague gratitude. But she had already reached a decision. "I'm going to Vienna," she said more quietly. "And at once."

He tried to bar her way out. "Let me go with you. Let me settle all this. Let me talk with him."

"You?" she asked with something like scorn.

He was no longer able to control himself and took hold of her hand. "Elisabeth, let me help you. Let me make amends for the wrong I've done. If only this could bring us together, Elisabeth. I loved you from the moment I saw you after my return. It isn't Angélique I love, it's you. You may despise me for what has happened. I deserve it, I deserve it amply. But I swear that henceforth I will do my best to be worthy of you. If I could only hope . . ."

At this moment the door opened and Angélique came in. But von Hagel kept Elisabeth's hand passionately and obstinately gripped in his. She had to free herself with violence. While he confessed his love in a hoarse voice she looked at him with distress in her eyes. But now with a frightened cry she rushed past him and her sister and went to her room to pack a suitcase in order to catch the evening train for Vienna.

Angélique remained standing in the doorway with a strange and slightly surprised smile on her lips. "I hope I did not come in at an inconvenient moment," she said.

Elisabeth spent a whole day wandering through Vienna in a vain attempt to find Stephan. At last she met his fellow medical student, who told her that he had probably taken refuge beyond the frontier. During their last meeting on the Friday Stephan had made several dark allusions to flight.

She also called on the woman for whose sake Stephan had committed his fatal folly. She was a very young blonde, not even particularly pretty, a coquette with a small sensual red mouth and infinite guilelessness in her astonished doll's eyes. She began by receiving her lover's sister with haughtiness, but soon enough she confirmed the medical student's story. She faithfully confessed that on the Friday she had been out with Stephan and a few friends. She seemed to consider it very necessary to insist upon the presence of these friends. Stephan was in a generous mood and paid for everything. He became a little drunk and talked of taking leave of them for good. He wanted to treat them all for the last time and to be merry because the next day he would no longer be with them. She did not take the thing very tragically, but now that his family were enquiring . . . Why, she thought it might be better not to keep this, and saying so she pulled a ring from her finger. He had given her this ring, but if by any chance he had not got the money for it at home, as he told her, well then she'd rather . . .

Elisabeth left the ring without touching it. She knew enough. What would Stephan do abroad? On what would he live? She wanted to write to tell him to come home, but how could she get at him? Her head was dizzy, she could no longer think. She could not imagine what was to happen now to him, to her, and to all of them.

The way Angélique received her on her return proved that she was impressed by what had happened. "Well? Did you find out any more? Has he really done it?" And when Elisabeth merely answered with a nod, she said with a sigh, "What a pretty mess."

Elisabeth thought this expression of contempt hardly called for, since Angélique had not exactly set a high example to Stephan. In order not to give a reply which she might have regretted she walked

on in the direction of her room, but this annoyed Angélique. "Where is he now?" she asked. "Across the frontier? We may call ourselves lucky that von Hagel is a gentleman."

"Don't you think it more important that Stephan is something else?"

"He has merely been weak," said Angélique, suddenly taking up his defence. "And if you look at it carefully you'll find that after all it's the fault of all of us."

"Each one of us can work out his own share of responsibility," said Elisabeth. Her voice trembled. "And to revert once more to Freiherr von Hagel, he must be paid the full sum, even though this will not wipe out our shame."

"He isn't waiting for his money," said Angélique with exasperating frivolity. "He said to me, 'As a matter of fact it was only fair that Stephan should cash in ten times what I had written out for him. By the time he got to the bank with my cheque the crown had already taken another knock.'"

Elisabeth made a sound of contempt and disgust.

"Of course," said Angélique, "I know sophistry does not appeal to you, and yet it's the only way to see things clearly, believe me. If you don't want to be broken by life, you must give up taking a sentimental view of it. You're still living in the pre-war world. I'm amazed each time I notice it. But you will perhaps consent to admit that the strange times in which we live are responsible for much of the evil around us."

"If we resign ourselves so easily, we don't deserve better times than those we have," was Elisabeth's opinion.

Angélique merely shrugged her shoulders. She was already thinking of something else.

"Apart from this, I wish to inform you that all is over between Siegfried and me."

Elisabeth could not pretend to be sorry about this, and Angélique did not expect it. "You've beaten me," she said in the same indifferent ironical tone. "Have you forgotten what I told you the first time I went to Vienna with him? If I come back with him and find that he still looks at you, then . . . I still thought that the honours would be mine! But it's the other way. . . ."

A letter came from Stephan. The postmark was Berlin but there was no address; he announced that a member of the party was giving him hospitality. The letter was written in a mood of profound remorse. He begged Elisabeth to forgive him. He must have been out of his mind, but now he had come to his senses and he realized the irreparable character of his action. He begged her not to tell his father. He realized that his guilt could not be wiped out, but he wanted to do all he could to pay back Freiherr von Hagel. He would

never have the courage to reappear before Elisabeth again. The letter which she had written him before his vacation was still in his pocket and he kept it because it was more precious than gold. If only he had read it with more attention at the time! Why had he thrown himself into this abyss before he came to realize what one lost by giving up one's good name. He had never been worthy of this name, any more than he was worthy of his sister. It was better to die honourably like Rudi, than to live on in disgrace. But he could not die because he had to live till he could acquit himself of his debt towards von Hagel. In a month's time he would write again if there was anything new to announce.

Elisabeth cried tears of joy as she read this letter. Perhaps Stephan's dreadful mistake had really brought him back to his senses. Even so he would never be able to live as a von Weygand, lord of the manor of Maria-Licht. But the letter brought relief to her taut nerves. It removed her main anxiety about Stephan. It also made her realize how impossible things were at present. Everything was coming to an end. Angélique, who had grown used to the pleasures of her Viennese expedition, would not stand the country very long. She was sure to go to Vienna or elsewhere with her little son. How long would Papa still live? For whose benefit was she to administer this stately house that was far too large?

She wanted to see clear, to find a way out of her impossible position. She went to the farm at a time she was sure to find Toni there. No hope was left for her, and therefore she need no longer be afraid of meeting him. He came towards her strangely excited, but she refused to notice it and asked him when precisely he thought of leaving. The friendliness left his face at once, and he said that he was merely waiting for Rudinger's successor. He was ready to hand over the work to him any day.

"If you are waiting so impatiently for him," she said, "you might surely do something to help me to find a suitable man for the work?" He looked at her with confusion. "But . . . haven't you found him yet?"

"It must be a man who can be trusted even if he is entirely without supervision," she continued, deeming his question unworthy of reply.

His astonishment increased. "Without supervision? Do you mean to say that the castle may be unoccupied one day?"

The tone in which he spoke unexpectedly released in her that treacherous weakness she knew so well. "You know as well as I do that my father is old. One day my sister is bound to go away with her child. What on earth am I to do here then, entirely by myself?"

"But your brother?"

It was a strange sensation. He enquired after Stephan, to whom

had befallen a catastrophe scarcely less than the brother's who had died in Toni's early youth. Toni could not possibly know this and yet his eyes looked exactly as they did when he stood there in the dry moat, with the child . . . or was it mere imagination? Supposing she had asked his help before it was too late, and told him what dangerous paths Stephan was treading in Vienna? She had been held back by her pride, but what was left of this pride now? She stood before him a second time like one who is guilty, and she had to speak to him with downcast eyes. "No," she said, "Stephan won't come here. At least not for some time. . . ."

He searched her face, curious, but he put no further questions. He saw her utter dejection. He realized now that she had no one to support her in her solitude, no one with whom she could talk freely. He also saw that she was unable to meet his glance when he looked her straight in the eyes. Suddenly he was certain of what he had often suspected: he possessed a power over her. And she seemed so near him. Could he risk the unthinkable, the mad thing, now? Perhaps it was his last and only chance. His breath came with difficulty. But it seemed to him almost as though she too were paralysed. No, he felt not the slightest inclination to go away and to leave the place for someone else. How could he ever have been so craven?

"And supposing I stayed here, here on the farm? Would that help you? Would it change something for you?" he asked, his voice stifled with hidden longing.

She tried to overcome the great weakness which these words aroused in her. Of course it would be reassuring to her if he stayed on at the farm! Of course it would change much for her! But more than his help perhaps she wanted the warmth and the affection that radiated from him. Oh, it was not only since to-day that she knew what she felt for him. She had fought against it with all her power. Never, even when she was alone and unobserved, had she allowed herself to wonder whether, after Paul's death, it was a consolation that Toni was fond of her, and whether perhaps she also did not feel more than a friendly affection for the playmate of her childhood. Till now it had all seemed so impossible, so very impossible to her.

But who was she now? What was she really? She still addressed him with the forms used in addressing an inferior and either from pity or from pride he too observed the rules of an etiquette that had grown senseless. And yet it was only too clear that she depended entirely on him.

Was he still waiting for her reply? It seemed to her as though she had already given it. Outside someone walked past the window. It was a labourer carrying pails of milk. She turned her face to Toni and unexpectedly she held out her hand, still hoping that this would merely express her gratitude without committing her. But he seized

the hand fiercely and drew her towards him with a restrained violence, and his eyes, betraying all his longing, looked into hers. She made a weak attempt to free herself, realizing as in a dream what she was doing. She would so gladly have given him what he wanted, after all he must have suffered because of her. She was lost and Toni wanted to save her. He could save her. Was she to hide the fact that she had faith in him? But supposing she did not love him after all? It was still Paul she loved, always Paul!

She closed her eyes and round her she felt an arm that was like that of Paul. It was so strong, so protecting and so tender; unexpectedly a strange glow passed through her. Here was something of the consolation for which she had yearned all these years. The realization overwhelmed her with confusion, and she freed herself, blushing deeply.

She thought that she would now walk out of the room but instead of this she walked to the window and stood there uncertain what to do and staring through a cloud into the late evening sunlight.

"Elisabeth . . ." he whispered.

She could not speak, she sank down on a chair, hiding her head in her hands.

"All right. . . . At least you know now," he whispered hoarsely. "It has troubled me so long. I always knew it was impossible. I knew it when you were only thirteen or fourteen, and I went to the agricultural school. When you became engaged to Paul I resigned myself because I felt sure you would be happy. Why did you avoid me? I have talked with him about you, again and again, always about you. At last I became afraid that he would guess something, and then I kept silent. Later, when he was no longer alive, I avoided you, all those years. I have blamed the whole world for my unhappiness; I've even been lectured by you for my rebelliousness. After that time I went in deadly fear of meeting you. When my father died I wanted to go away at once, but *you* wanted me to stay. You asked it and that was enough. It made me suffer, and sometimes I thought I would not be able to bear it. Now I thank God I stayed. It does me so much good to be able to tell you everything at last!" His voice trembled.

She still did not speak. Had she perhaps not heard him? Suddenly he noticed a movement of her shoulders. She was crying. He came a step nearer. "Leave me," she begged helplessly. She rose with a slight uncertainty. "Let me come to myself. Let me go now, I must think about it."

He accompanied her silently to the door, and when he returned to the room his head was still in a whirl. What had happened here during these few minutes? What had she said? That she must reflect? Think it over? That was something at any rate! He was

startled by his mother, who came in while he was pacing up and down the room. Old Magdalena was wise enough not to question him. She merely asked whether he did not intend to come for his meal at all to-night.

Elisabeth struggled the whole night, but she had to admit to herself that she had already come to a decision when she left the farm. Whatever might be the feelings which linked her for ever with Paul, she was profoundly fond of Toni and prepared to grant the prayer which in its audacity showed how desperately serious he was. She was prepared to face all the difficulties that would arise and all the consequences of the conviction that was growing stronger every hour. There was only one way left to her. She must remain by his side here in the country in the old familiar environment. In the end she found it hardly possible to realize that foolish prejudices could have prevented her admitting this earlier. She wanted to compensate him to the full for the suffering which she had needlessly inflicted upon him.

Was this all? Was she allowing herself to be guided merely by a feeling of guilt and by practical considerations? What was this magic power in Toni that made her feel something like hope and confidence while yesterday she was still without a guide and utterly dejected? Was it perhaps simpler than she had imagined to answer the love of a man in whom one finds one's salvation? When she closed her eyes and made herself think of nothing else, she found that his embrace was like that of Paul. How long would it be before she could surrender without thinking of anything else to the infinite protection of such a warm, manly and loving caress?

No doubt there was something childish in trying to soothe her conscience with the reflection that Paul and he had been friends. And yet . . . ! They had talked about her together, their thoughts about her had secretly been the same. Would Paul not forgive her, if in her loneliness she sought protection with Toni?

Notwithstanding the determination which this night had given her she felt surprised at the quiet confidence with which she told her decision to Angélique on the following morning. She was not in the least upset when Angélique gravely announced that she must have taken leave of her senses.

"Is that why you refused von Hagel?" was Angélique's first amazed comment.

"No, there were other reasons. But now that you mention him I can say that to have refused him makes it easier for me to accept Toni."

Angélique looked at her still in wonder. "If in my turn I may be funny for a moment, may I ask you whether you intend that he

should come and live here at Maria-Licht or do you think you're going to live on the farm with him?"

"We have not yet discussed any details, but I believe that I can easily guess what his decision will be."

"Whatever it may be," said Angélique, suddenly unable to control her rage any longer, "I wish you to know that I shan't stay here."

Elisabeth felt a strange pain. She tried to hide it and, speaking as gently as she could, she said: "Till now I was the one who showed excessive pride in our name and whose ideas were so old-fashioned."

"I have still enough pride left not to wish to be made ridiculous in the eyes of our whole staff."

"Nobody will laugh here. They are all fond of him. And they respect him."

"Then the only thing I'm afraid of is that I shall be unable to control my own laughter." And when Elisabeth looked away with raised eyebrows and a curious expression Angélique added: "It's lucky for you that Papa won't find out about it!"

"Yes, I consider it a blessing that Papa has not understood a number of things that have happened here recently." Elisabeth thought this was about enough and left her sister. She wanted to get through her usual morning occupations as soon as she could and to go to the fields where she knew Toni was working.

Left alone at the breakfast table, Angélique was still unable to believe that Elisabeth had really been in earnest.

"She's crazy," she repeated softly and furiously, but as she sat there muttering she discovered that behind her anger there was a secret envy of Elisabeth's quiet determination, of her unlimited courage, and of the youthful glow which suddenly seemed to have lit up her tired eyes. She tried to visualize Toni and for the first time she realized that as far as appearances went he could easily stand his own in comparison with von Hagel. And also as regards education. The only fatal thing was . . .! Had Elisabeth fallen in love with him? If so he had achieved a miracle in making her renounce her decision to remain faithful to the end to her dead fiancé.

Angélique continued to ponder this miracle and gradually she began to think about herself. The evening before she had again given way to an impulse and written to her husband. She intended to post the letter at Klagenfurt in the course of the morning, but she did not expect that it would bring her a reply any more than her previous letters. She did not want to think any longer. For a moment a mocking smile appeared on her mouth as she imagined Siegfried's face when he heard the news. Would she write to the old Vienna address just for fun? She would have preferred to tell him herself.

What did it really matter? Why was she getting excited? Perhaps, in a world full of *ersatz*, a decision like Elisabeth's was a rare and

genuine thing. And after what had happened with Stephan . . . Yes, her sister was right, and she, Angélique, was jealous. She was sufficiently magnanimous to admit this. Social prejudice! She had imagined that she did not care for him any longer. Would she mind social prejudices if she could recapture her husband? Had she herself paid much attention to them when she travelled with Siegfried to Vienna and speculated there like any stockbroker?

She walked up and down the room a little longer. All these reflections did not help very much to realize the situation under the eyes of these old family portraits! But what did this castle matter to her, this castle from which once before she had fled, and which from a distance had appeared to her anachronistic, an unbelievable little world of its own where she would never again find a place. What did she care for these ancestors who, if they knew everything, would shake their bewigged heads not only about Elisabeth's decision but about all that had happened in the last few years and not the least about herself? Perhaps the moment had arrived at last for drawing the line once and for all.

She came to a decision and went to Elisabeth, who was too busy to notice at once the change in her sister that had taken place in such a short while.

"I've thought it over," said Angélique, "and I've come to the conclusion that you are right after all."

Elisabeth said nothing. She had never known so well that she was right as after the hateful and empty reproaches which her sister had thrown at her an hour ago. And so Angélique had come to see it as well?

"I didn't think you would ever have had the courage to do this," Angélique continued. "And I think that's why I was so amazed at first." Elisabeth shrugged her shoulders, but Angélique noticed that her sister was at least listening to her. "I dare say you'll meet him to-day," she said. "Wish him happiness from me, will you?"

Unable to master her emotion, Elisabeth came towards her with her arms wide open.

"I don't deserve that you should kiss me," said Angélique, hiding her confusion under her usual indifferent tone, "but you're made that way."

"I'm so happy because of what you've just told me. Why do you want to leave us, Angélique? Oh, do stay! Where would you go to?"

Angélique had a momentary return of irony. "Just tell me first of all whether I've clearly understood that you intend to go and live with him on the farm?"

"It seems to me the logical conclusion. If we did anything else . . . then there would be people who would laugh."

"And don't you think that it will be difficult at first?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, you won't admit it, and you needn't, but there is something else. Have you thought already what will have to be done about Papa?"

"There are still many things about which I haven't thought. But Papa is the easiest problem of all. Anna can go on looking after him."

"But what do you intend to do with the castle?"

"With the castle? What do you mean?"

"Maybe Toni will suggest what has just passed through my head."

"And what's that?"

Angélique hesitated, then she brought it out. "Let it!"

Elisabeth looked up in speechless amazement.

"Does this seem so strange to you?" Angélique asked. "To me it seems the only natural thing to do. But if I've startled you, we are quits. I will even confess to you that it isn't the first time that this idea has occurred to me! When I read the advertisements in the Viennese papers . . . The papers are full of them. Let it, to a rich foreigner! And at a good price fixed in foreign currency. A Chicago sausage manufacturer can live here in a castle that is guaranteed genuine and complete with everything, at a price he would pay at home for an attic room. With his dollars we could in the first place pay off Stephan's debt to von Hagel. And, as you admit yourself, Papa won't notice it. And then I've another idea. I'm rich in ideas to-day, thanks to you. You would like me to stay, wouldn't you? If you will entrust me with the task I can stay here to supervise things. For a time only, of course, and if circumstances are favourable it doesn't seem unamusing to me."

Elisabeth stared at her. Perhaps she had not understood her last words. "Do you think that Toni would have proposed such a thing to me?" she asked.

Angélique could not help laughing. She took a deep breath because the whole development of her plan had excited her more than she wanted to admit.

"I think," she said slowly, "that you could in any case not do Toni a greater pleasure than to suggest this to him: it will prove that you've definitely come to terms with the thing which still stands between you."

"I was just going to see him," Elisabeth confessed weakly.

This did not seem at all surprising to Angélique. "I've got to go to Klagenfurt this morning," she said, and her voice suddenly sounded tired.

Elisabeth looked after her as she left the room. She had never been able to fathom her sister and she was not able to do so now. Nevertheless she believed that a moment ago she had been given a glimpse into her strange and unaccountable heart. They had never yet stood so

close together. And Stephan also was nearer to her than before. Was life after all giving her this new wealth when everything seemed lost?

She tried to remember what precisely Angélique had told her about the castle. It was so strange, so unbelievable. . . . But perhaps Toni would think it very ordinary and reasonable. Perhaps it was the castle that still stood between them. And there must be nothing, ~~nothing~~ whatever between them.

What else had she still got to do? There were a few domestic duties to perform, but she could not possibly remember what they were. Presently . . . presently. She must first of all go to him. She changed quickly and arranged her hair before the looking-glass. Perhaps, at twenty-eight, she was not so old after all? Downstairs little Jacques came towards her: his Mama had told him that Aunt Elisabeth would go out with him where Toni and the men and the maids were at work.

She took his little hand and walked with him through the gate and across the bridge. Involuntarily she turned round to look at the castle for which Angélique had made such strange plans. She felt as though she were already leaving it for ever. She looked up at the familiar slate-covered roofs on which the moss grew. They had protected her childhood, and equally familiar was the grey weather-beaten clock-tower. When they were still small it used to chime on the Emperor's birthday. There was the room in which all of them—Rudi, Angélique, and the first Stephan—had slept together. And there was the window behind which Paul had studied. That window was the one from which Stephan . . . She turned away quickly. She saw Toni's face before her, but it was young again as in the days when he was a kind-hearted understanding big brother who watched over her and the other children. She felt young again, and it was as though the suffering of years slipped off her in a moment.

"Come, Jacques!"

They went side by side. The little boy tripped merrily in the expectation of something not very clear but that must be full of pleasantness, because Aunt Elisabeth was walking with such different steps, lighter and happier than usual.

They walked a little way through the wood. . . . Then before them opened the blue autumn sky, bathed in the sun, and the wide fields that had carried their harvest once more and were ready for the plough and for the harrow, ready once more to take within them the seed that would bring new fruit.

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